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THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

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A manifesto for marginals

By J. R. Vincent

TONY BENN:

Arguments for Democracy
 Edited by Chris Mullin
 257pp. Jonathan Cape. £6.95.
 0 224 01878 7

This book is based upon speeches, lectures, and articles written or delivered in the two years up to April 1981; in other words, on bits and pieces. Yet the text has far more unity than such a description might suggest, and the compliments may reasonably go to the editor, a *Tribune* journalist. A point to watch is that this is a companion volume to the author's *Arguments for Socialism* (1979) which covered his speeches of 1975-79. Not since Mr Gladstone's Midlothian days have the ephemera of the platform been so lovingly garnered.

And with reason. Mr Benn is rather good at this sort of thing. He has a touch ten times lighter than that of Lord Owen. He is ten times less departmentally minded than Shirley Williams (I refer of course, in each case, to their recent books). He has the expository zeal of Mr Powell. In fact, although he has some reputation as an administrator who rarely puts a foot wrong, he makes curiously little reference to his official experience. But if he travels light where knowledge is concerned, his range of ideas is quite unusually wide, probably wider than that of anyone else in his own party. Some would say the ideas are not his own; that he is a ready borrower from young graduates and young journalists; but his receptiveness to fashion is surely partly to his credit. Benn's political practice might get us into difficulties, because it is not as good as other people's practice, but his ideas certainly cannot be dismissed by some sweeping reference to a supposed stock of better and wiser ideas held out to us by other politicians, for no such stock exists.

His book falls into two parts. The first, on "The Power of the Establishment", diagnoses the British disease. Britain is no democracy. We are the last unliberated colony. We have a premiership that is really a dictatorship. The civil service has great and uncontrolled power; democratic control of science raises great issues; the press is in the hands of the press lords. The story loses nothing in the telling, but when Mr Benn tells us that power lies with the powerful, he will not find many to contend against him. Democracy in this country has indeed been the figment, not of capitalism on its own, but of a constitutional state with a powerful executive government that has deep historic roots in various élites, classes, and institutions. When Benn, ever voyaging on strange seas of thought, goes a little further and asks if this is not frightfully unfair, the answer all sensible men have always given is that of course it is. Bagehot a hundred years ago gave the answers; now Benn supplies the questions.

In the second part of the book, "The Way Ahead", the author both surveys the heavens, and prescribes medicine. He deals with the relations between Christianity and socialism, the future of the trades unions, the need for Labour Party democracy, defence, the re-ordering of Europe, and the transition to democratic socialism. Apart from economic questions, which are too sedulously avoided, here is plenty indeed, a truly prime-ministerial abundance of great thoughts. Before examining Benn's latest positions in detail - and they are not what one might think - let us note that the book generally represents a move to the right, an attempt to reassure something which Benn does well. It is not a socialist book. Our old friend, the working class, simply does not appear under that name. The emphasis is on class collaboration, not class conflict. The appeal is to the soft centre, whether it be in the author's constituency, which became multi-marginal in 1979, or to the great hazy heart of

the trades unions on whom Mr Benn's career now depends, or to what Lord Blake resonantly calls the moral anxieties of a prosperous intelligentsia.

Mr Benn's left-wing phase began in 1970, when the election defeat suddenly removed him from the role of the prime minister's bright young man. Before 1970 he went through reformist and technocratic phases which lasted at least as long as his present mood. After 1970 he saw correctly that there was a left-wing ladder to the top waiting to be climbed and that he was the only person around with sufficient standing to climb it. Over ten years he has got the Left to commit itself to him, without committing himself in any very definite way to the Left. His change to "Tony Benn" is also thought locally to coincide with a swing to the left in his constituency party. But his remarkable power to absorb has its limitations. He can soak up successive radical fashions among the middle classes and the young. He is a great success with the deferential working class. He is a success with proletarian militants who operate rather like student politicians. But he has far less appeal to Labour voters than Denis Healey, and justly so, for Benn represents an essentially middle-class radicalism, and he appears to know next to nothing of marxist ideas.

Mr Benn's lack of marxist analysis may be singular, but it is not purely tactical. It stems from his roots in an older tradition. He is, as he is at pains to stress, a time-traveller from a bygone age, that of the great Edwardian conflict of Peers v People. This is where Benn feels at home; or so his rhetoric of the moment would have us believe. To understand his vision of the world, we had better read, not Marx, but H. G. Wells's picture of the Liberal Party in *The New Machiavelli*, as "a system of hostilities and objections that somehow achieves at times an elusive common soul". We have in Benn an updated version of socialism's oldest enemy, bourgeois liberalism. The emotions are old as the hills. Benn scents danger in the swish of ermine, as Ian Paisley does in the swish of a soutane. The army that Benn leads, the army of the marginal, the grand coalition of blacks, gays, women, ecologists, Irish, CND, and the militant lumpen-intelligentsia, may perfectly well turn into a historic force - the *Guardian* made flesh, as it were. Even so, it would be as far from a marxian class as one can be; not necessarily

an objection in the eyes of ambitious or sentimental young graduates playing at Young England. But if I were a member of the Militant Tendency, I should be studying the careers of Ramsay MacDonald and Harold Wilson with anxious care, and viewing with concern Benn's appeals to "fair-minded people in all parties, and in none", his hopes of reawakening "rural radicalism" in "battles against the squiresarchy" and his concern for small businessmen.

Mr Benn will, of course, have to rid himself of an entourage, some comically rabid, some, like Mr Meacher, quintessentially sincere sentimentalists, and most of them rather too obviously graduates, before he can reveal himself as a sheep in sheep's clothing. He will know that, as previous premiers have found, it is easier to acquire an entourage than to lose one, but bearing in mind the deftness with which he shed his former skin as chairman of the Fabian Society (1965-66), he should not despair. Those of us who merely read the press have been poorly served here, for journalists have offered abuse which explains nothing, whereas Benn needs to be explained, more than with most politicians, in terms of those around him, as an old man who is willing to listen to the articulate young. A major politician is not a person, but a group of people. Our journalists will not name him, will not explain to us that politicians sail at the head of little squadrons as under George III. For all Benn's complaints about the media, the fierce light that beats upon him does not intrude upon his Holland Park.

Failing other evidence, one might conclude from this text alone that Benn was in the hands of a select group of intimates, rather like Hugh Gaitskell's Froggall group. The lot of the northern artisan does not obtrude largely. Benn is at his most Bennish when he resembles an issue of *Time Out*, when he runs fast to keep up with E. P. Thompson, when he echoes metropolitan graduate conservatism. When he condemns "shallow materialism", he offers the excitement of asceticism to the privileged, to those who have something to give up; in other words, not to the Labour voters of the north. When he turns to preach a socially conscious Christianity, he is again making the assumption of a middle-class audience. When he talks of the dangers of a military coup, when he denounces the feudal trappings of the constitution, he is talking the language of the class of '68. He is

the preacher of metaphysical woes to men with full stomachs. (He has very little to say on inflation.) When he compares the successes of the gold speculator to the hardships of the steelworker, it is not the hardships suffered that worry him, but the immorality of the success enjoyed. (It is also "an insult to many thousands of small businessmen.") This is puritanism, not proletarianism. Benn does not put the working class first and he seems, in this book, to have dropped his former flag from his masthead, about an irreversible transfer of wealth and power to working people. At any rate, that phrase no longer appears.

Mr Benn puts his own family tradition first. The key to his character is that he has never rebelled. He is a hereditary figure, just as Shirley Williams and Michael Foot are hereditary figures. They honour everything for which their parents stood (in Benn's case this includes a religious mother as well as a political father). Benn's claim to a Christian foundation for his beliefs must be taken seriously. Though confirmed as an Anglican when at his public school, Westminster, he now presents himself as a "student of the teachings of the historical Jesus - and I lay claim to be such a student and no more..." who finds a "revolutionary" meaning in "loving thy neighbour as thyself", and, while somewhat coy about his own position, points to the bridge, a rather long one it seems, linking the teachings of Jesus with the Peasants' Revolt, the Levellers, the Chartists, ecology, democracy, internationalism, and the closed shop. This grey area between liberal protestantism and secular humanism may lack something in intellect, but if Benn is in error here, he has much of official religion with him.

To sully these pages with gross plagiarism, Jesus is presented, in Muggelridge's term, as the Labour member for Galilee South. The action of the Good Samaritan is identified with the socialist position, when the reverse is true. The Samaritan, far from seeking generic social services, tried to substitute charity for collectivism. Indeed, by paying for the imkeeper twopence from his own pocket, he was positively inciting Herod to reduce social service budgets still further. The Good Samaritan, far from being a forerunner of Beveridge, was breaking every rule in the book.

Jesus was no better when it comes to the liberal catechism of today. He was not the Harriet Beecher Stowe

of the first century. He offered no structural solution to the problem of the oppressed Samaritan minority; indeed, even the story of the Good Samaritan has racist overtones. It is like a story about an intelligent Irishman, or generous Scot; it implies the opposite can be taken as normal. On slavery, Jesus was sound (ie not against it), like all good and wise men, including, as far as one can see, slaves, until very recently. The building up of Jesus as a forerunner of secular liberal collectivism creaks. So does the cant use of "Am I my brother's keeper?" as if it were a biblical injunction to trade unionism. For, first, it treats an interrogative as if it were an imperative, which is a simple inability to read; and, secondly, the question proceeds not from high authority, but from Cain, a murderer and therefore a debatable source of advice even on trade-union questions.

The liberal or democratic socialist Jesus, never credible at serious levels, is now absurd even at popular levels, because the points considered vital by liberalism and social democracy have changed so greatly in recent decades. None of this will stop Mr Benn presenting himself as "a socialist whose political commitment owes more to the teachings of Jesus - without the mysteries within which they are presented - than to the writings of Marx..." My brand of socialism derives from Christian teaching. I was confirmed as an Anglican, but as I have got older the mystery, the ritual and the organization of the church have been less interesting to me. Benn calls out for Christians "to speak up loud and clear against monetarism and militarism... Britain too now needs a liberation theology... In Britain today Christians have a key role in determining the final outcome of the argument about the future pattern of power". Benn's lightness of touch in occupying the middle ground between belief and unbelief, in touching on exactly the right current concerns in Christian and especially clerical thought, in presenting himself as the heir of the Christian centuries, shows an instinct for representing centre opinion which we (and the Militant Tendency) would be foolish to dismiss.

Benn's flair for grasping the workings of the ordinary mind comes out in his handling of the House of Lords. It is not sufficient to say that its abolition, however trivial, would serve Labour well, as the issue that divides the party (as with Gladstone's Irish Church disestablishment in 1868); or that it would probably push the Tories into embarrassments; or that Benn has still ringing in his ears his first great success, in retaining his seat on inheriting his father's title. No; it is that, living in a society where progress is supposed to drop like manna and very rarely does, it can at least be seen that the Tory majority in the Upper House does, occasionally, block Labour measures. There are a hundred and one other reasons why Labour manifestos remain unconsummated; but none so visible as the House of Lords. Benn therefore speaks for popular prejudice when he says the Upper House must go; but how he will miss it when it has gone.

Curiously, Benn has already struck a giant blow against democracy. He may abolish the Lords, which will not matter, but he will also put the monarchy back in business, which will matter very much. So long as we had an apparently indestructible two-party system, one could assume that the monarchy would remain decorative. But if, to accommodate Benn, we are to have a multi-party system with a period of hung parliaments and great confusion, then the head of state has in effect to create majorities where the electorate has failed. Mr Benn, being wise in his generation, says nothing which might impair future relations. While writing little howlers on democracy, he is in fact ensuring that Charles III will have to make more important decisions than any monarch since

Making a bed

for Jill after twenty years

'We have here three sorts of bed'
 (Plato, *The Republic*)

God made the first - in a dreamwork-shop behind the bicycle leaning on the nose of the carpenter from Minsk. Straight from the mows of childhood, it came to a jingling stop.

Take off the runners and there you are: curved footboard, scalloped for reins, curved headboard, crested and carved with balts - a bed fit for a tar and tarins. The carpenter took wood and under his gauging thumb it grew towards the trolls-bed that you and I tasted and found good.

So why make another? A spare bed may have its use: as when one, at the end of a day, having eaten and done the dishes, remembers the other head on the other pillow, and can resume the broken journey, riding to sleep, breathing in unison, breathing deep, twin plumes braided in a single plume.

Jon Stallworthy

The sorrows of one who laughs

By Paul Bailey

ISAK DINESEN:
Letters from Africa 1914-1931
Edited by Frans Lasson. Translated
by Anne Born
474pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£12.95.
0 297 78000 X

The first thing that needs to be said about this exceptional volume of letters is that it has been attributed to the wrong author. "Isak Dinesen" did not come into being until 1934, almost three years after Karen Blixen had left Africa in the harrowing circumstances that inform the book's closing pages. It's worth making the distinction, if only because the distinction was of such prime importance to its originator: when Karen Blixen added "Isak" (which means "one who laughs" in Hebrew) to her maiden name, it was with a view to taking on the role of storyteller - a deliberate act of personal obliteration. The hallmark of Isak Dinesen's narrative art is a serene indifference to both happiness and misery, and every condition between the two. Life, according to this essential tale-bearer, is of necessity tragicomic. The Karen Blixen who wrote these letters from Africa to her family in Denmark is a passionate and argumentative woman of many and varied moods; a questioner; a fighter. To talk of her in terms of serenity and detachment would be nonsensical.

Karen Christentze Dinesen was born and raised in Rungstedlynd, her family's eighteenth-century house in the small country town of Rungsted, which is not far from Elsinore. Like the latter's most famous inmate, she came to look upon her country as a prison. In her twenties she had seen enough of European culture, in France and Italy, to convince her that she was being stifled. She was already proficient in two foreign languages, French and English (she later became fluent in German), yet she was uncertain about the true nature of her gifts. She craved colour and excitement. "How desperately she longed for wings to carry her away," wrote her brother Thomas in his short memoir of her. The wings which did transport her - to British East Africa, in 1914, when she was twenty-eight - belonged to Baron Bror Blixen-Finecke, who was born and in the exuberant portrait of Buckle at war. The rest of his life has certainly been eventful, but passed largely in metropolitan social and artistic circles whose affairs will be very much closer to the general than if he can set the world against the background of its times and make, as Proust succeeded in doing, the story of his adventures within it both a microcosm reflecting vaster social changes and an illustration of the eternal truths about human relationships; if he can take all the glittering Craven material he has accumulated and impose on it a solid discipline; then he will certainly succeed in his declared ambition of writing a masterpiece. Anyhow he has certainly made an excellent start.

It has been suggested, on what would appear to be reliable grounds, that her beloved father, Wilhelm Dinesen, suffered from the same disease, which he had contracted in his youth. Wilhelm hanged himself in the most brilliant of his five children was only ten. He had been depressed for a considerable time, possibly at the knowledge that his illness was by now unstoppable. This extraordinary man was a much-decorated soldier, an essayist, a politician and an adventurer: it was in that last capacity that he lived for many months with a tribe of Chippewa Indians in Wisconsin. "The Indians are better than our civilized people of Europe," Karen Blixen remembered him telling her. "Their eyes see more than ours, and they are wiser." His words are echoed and re-echoed whenever she writes about the Kenyan Africans - the Somalis in particular. It is clear in her autobiography *Out of Africa*, that she had no desire - unlike the majority of white settlers - to turn the natives (her word) into Kikuyu. Even when the threat of exasperation, she retains her belief that to attempt to change them totally is to destroy them.

Out of Africa is a work of romance, a pastoral: it captures the essence of a feudal society that was

doomed to vanish. It will be read when all the plodding, self-justifying memoirs of the colonists are long forgotten. *Letters from Africa 1914-1931* supplies the background details, often pedestrian, which Karen Blixen took such pains to leave out of her masterpiece - the kind of details, in fact, with which most autobiographies are top-heavy. There is no indication in *Out of Africa* that its author is struggling to preserve her relationship with her philandering husband; very little is said there about the financial pressures that weighed upon her, while her love for Hatton is couched in language that suggests they were ideal hunting companions and brothers in the spirit, it chums almost. The sexual anguish she felt whenever he left her to go on his frequent trips is merely hinted at, whereas in her letters to Thomas - which were not written with publication in mind - she declares it absolutely. "It is a magical effect that he has upon me; never have I ever known such a feeling of happiness as I have in his company. It is as if I get light and air after having been confined in a room..." she tells her mother on September 21, 1930.

It is now certain that Karen Blixen twice thought herself pregnant by the lover she aptly nicknamed "Ariel". She was aware that the syphilis had been arrested to the extent that it was no longer infectious, yet she still had misgivings - perfectly understandable ones for those pre-judicial days about bearing a child. She had doubts, too, about her liaison with Denys, who seemed - even at the time she was describing his "magical effect" upon her - to be wary of a deeper involvement. She sensed that "Ariel" would soon be flitting away for ever. On May 14 1931, she was to be proved right, though hardly in the manner she had anticipated, when Denys's plane crashed shortly after take-off and he was killed instantly. The stoicism that is everywhere apparent in the intricately detailed stories of Isak Dinesen might well have been born in this, the darkest, period of Karen Blixen's life. "I want so terribly to live, I want so terribly not to die," she had written to her brother five years earlier. It will remain a mystery exactly when she tried to commit suicide, but the attempt must have been made in those terrible months prior to her reluctant departure from Ngong and the coffee plantation she had laboured in vain to run successfully.

At the end of the book, one finds Karen Blixen returning to her family, to the people who have supported her financially and against whom she has waged more or less constant intellectual and moral battles. The letters make one understand the depth of her need to turn herself into Isak Dinesen, to become - once and for all - a witty spectator of human affairs, whose greatest concern is with the business of writing. In several of them, however, she can be seen trying to quell this need: she wants to be open to every experience; she wants to be involved in life to the fullest extent. She is at her most contentious when she is trying to convince her spinster aunt, Mary Bess Westenholtz, that marriage is not necessarily the only answer to a maiden's prayer, that there are women - Karen Blixen, for example - who would rather be free to go on safari, or to study mathematics (a subject considered too "manly" for girls even in the early years of the twentieth century), or to do anything other than knit and sew and tend to the requirements of a man. She reminds her aunt that her niece, Karen, is interested in sport and science as well as art. She points out that

a woman's "morals" are understood as something purely sexual just as a woman's "honor" always has to do purely with sex. An "honorable" man is in general thought to be a man who under-

stands and follows such clear and simple human concepts as honesty, reliability, loyalty, fearlessness: an "honest woman" is a woman who maintains certain traditions in her relationship with men...

In other words, honesty in women is equated with the retention of virginity before marriage, and with complete sexual fidelity to the chosen partner afterwards.

She argues less frequently, but with similar purpose, with her mother, Ingeborg Dinesen. There is a magnificent letter in which she defends her right not to divorce Bror Blixen. How dare the family insist that she break her vows? They know nothing, these penny-pinchers, of her husband's deeper failings and disloyalties (it is her implication), only of his waywardness in matters of his waywardness. Karen Blixen is ill-equipped in matters of money. Simply because she and Bror are financially dependent on the Dinesen estate does not give the various aunts and uncles the right to command that she should terminate her marriage. Of course, she did divorce Bror Blixen eventually, but of her own volition; after much soul-searching, and when it was all clear to her that his affair with Jacqueline "Cockie" Birckbeck was more serious than his customary casual fling.

The fascination of this book is not just in the rounded picture it provides of a vanished Africa, vivid though that is, but rather in the way it reveals the determined landowner developing into the assured literary artist: the confusions of Karen Blixen become the fictional material for the "one who laughs". To appreciate these letters to the full, it is necessary to be acquainted not only with *Out of Africa* (in which both Farah, Blixen's Somali servant, and Kamante, her cook of genius, are unforgettable recreations), but with the neglected (neglected in Britain, alas) stories of Isak Dinesen. One in particular deserves mention - "The Dreamers" from *Seven Gothic Tales*, in which the famous operatic soprano Pellaegria Leoni loses her voice irretrievably during a performance of *Don Giovanni*. "The Dreamers" is a completely achieved fiction, casting its own peculiar spell, yet it does exhibit definite resemblances to Karen Blixen's fated African life. The failure of her farm was like a mortal blow to her, as terrible as the singer's loss of her dazzling gift. Pellaegria tells her closest friend and devoted admirer to inform the world that she has died, and Karen Blixen writes to the ever loyal Thomas at the peak of her unhappiness to say that it is a dead woman who will be returning to Denmark. Pellaegria elects to become an enchantress, as her creator did: "I will be always many persons from now. Never again will I have my heart and my whole life bound up with one woman, to suffer so much." It is the business of true storytellers to be many persons; whom they will take life by means of artifice: Karen Blixen was in her mid-forties when she began, in earnest, to employ those means.

Isak Dinesen's shrewdness and most sympathetic critic, Robert Langbaum, has praised her for her rare ability to objectify a character's inner persons in terms of plot and action. Introspection and analysis are very seldom allowed to interrupt, and slacken the narrative. Her abandonment of the psychological method was the deliberate act of a writer of highly sophisticated intelligence - for, as the letters display, she could analyse and dissect and worry over people's motives for behaving as they do with a properly human concern. Her stories respect that concern in the reader, so that explanation is unnecessary: this absorber of the Greek myths and the Norse sagas knew that she could put her faith in the deed itself. She is, as Ivy Compton-Burnett might have said,

an extremely "deedy" chronicler. Examine the deeds, she hints, and you will see the man. And women.

The least satisfying aspect of the letters is, paradoxically, the one in which literature is discussed. Galsworthy, and yet again Galsworthy - has *The Forsyte Saga* ever been examined at such length? That limitlessly drab work is afforded the attention only masterpieces merit; and the editor of the letters, Frans Lasson, could surely have spared us Précis Number Three of the Story So Far. Doubts are expressed on the genius of Sigrid Undset, whose *Kristin Lavransdatter* won its author the Nobel Prize. *The Constant Nymph* is lauded. Lawrence, Joyce, Eliot and smart circles of Nairobi. Blixen acknowledges her indebtedness to Hans Christian Andersen and to the Jewish novelist Meir Aron Goldschmidt, whose work is virtually unknown outside Denmark, but otherwise there is little about the major influences on her own writing. Some stray snippets tantalize, like the few notably observant thoughts on Dickens, which make one wish that she had looked more often at the incontestably great. She places Dickens as the celebrator of a vital Englishness. His sympathy with the eccentric and outcast, she argues, more than compensates for the lip-service he pays the middle classes and their stifling morality, which are personified for her by Britain's dull Hanoverian Queen, Victoria.

It is no wonder that so many of Isak Dinesen's stories are set at the

end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, with the collapse of the old order, the *ancien régime*. Karen Blixen's political views are not always easy to follow, but they are surprisingly republican. This unashamed aristocrat despises the English for their besottedness with the monarchy. She seems to favour the idea of revolution, which fits uneasily with her hatred for all things bourgeois. She has a Romantic notion that there are true aristocrats of the spirit, among whom are many of the black Africans whose love and respect she never lost. She was, I suppose, essentially a feudalist - but of an unconventional kind. A feudalist and a feminist - it is a strikingly odd combination.

This absorbing, brilliant book has been translated by Anne Born, who admirably captures the Blixen tone. Since it was printed in America, the English reader has to endure American spelling and some unsettling punctuation: every parenthesis is marked with two dashes and two commas. (Is this a Danish custom, perhaps?) One ghostly piece of jargon should be eliminated from a second edition: "centering around". I can't believe that a self-conscious stylist like Karen Blixen ever perpetrated its equivalent, particularly in 1928. Let me say finally that the collection contains one wonderful letter by another hand: it was written by Ingeborg Dinesen to her son, Thomas, and explains her daughter's wish to emulate Wilhelm Dinesen. It cannot fail to move anyone who believes, as civilized people must believe, in the selfless grandeur of disinterested love.

COMING ON OCTOBER 15

Thomas Wiseman/Savage Day

Thomas Wiseman's new novel *Savage Day* addresses itself to a moral mystery, the crime of the atomic physicists to which Oppenheimer alluded when he spoke of them all as having "known sin".

On one level a thriller of exceptional suspensefulness, Wiseman's novel turns the conventions of that form to his own rather special use - to look into the heart of darkness and inquire into the murderousness of the human spirit.

Wiseman's detective/inquirer is a failed physicist turned wartime security officer at Los Alamos. It is he, a man for whom the vast mind-boggling abstractions of the new physics seem to leave out the human dimension, who is faced with the task of solving a series of accidents at the atomic research station that appear to have about them an element of divine retribution. Are they acts of God, or of a madman? As the investigator Richter becomes more and more deeply drawn into the mystery, there begins to emerge the outline of the sin to which Oppenheimer referred. This sin or crime, Wiseman appears to suggest, was omniscience - knowing better than God. In the service of their monumental hubris the scientists entered into a Faustian bargain to know all. Their - and our - nemesis is the discovery that God permits all, including the atomic bomb.

Different readers will find different things to admire and be held by in Thomas Wiseman's novel. It is, like his six previous novels, a many-sided tale. His strong gift of story-telling is very evident here again.

With a virtuosity of style and method that sometimes suggests several different writers, he has in the past written about Hollywood tycoons, the psychological knot that ties together a Nazi and a Jew in wartime Vienna, the novelist who begets his wife's affair with another man by imagining it, the pact that cold war strategy enforces between escaping Nazis and their conquerors, and the spy as fabled trickster. Underlying these varied stories are several recurring themes, of which the most constant has been escape from an intolerable situation, something that may date back to his own escape at the age of eight from Nazi-occupied Austria.

Whatever the ostensible story in Wiseman's novels, there is always a subtext, a secret passage to other meanings, other aims. The TLS made this point in reviewing *The Quick and the Dead* when it said: "Mr Wiseman's detailed realism is unfailingly impressive. But it works in the service not of social comment or psychological revelation but of high, sardonic satire. The humour and the horror are both subtler and more disquieting as a result."

JONATHAN CAPE / £6.95



"Le cours promenade", acrylic on canvas-buckled paper, 1980, by Jean Dubuffet; from an exhibition of Dubuffet's recent works at the Waddington Galleries, 4 Cork Street, London W1, until October 3.

Within the dandy

By Michael Howard

RICHARD BUCKLE:
The Most Upsetting Woman
Autobiography Volume I
288pp. Collins. £8.95.
00 216 326 8

In the Brigade of Guards in Italy during the war Dicky Buckle combined the reputations of a Lord Lovat and of a rather up-market Quentin Crisp. It was quite unfairly believed that any guardsman who served under him must have faced a choice between almost certain death in hazardous action or an allegedly worse fate out of it. He was an original, a dandy, flamboyant, outrageous in behaviour, utterly fearless, meticulous in taste, impressively learned, master of a wide range of life-enhancing talents, a wit, a dilettante, on occasion, when discussing about his ancestry, a ponderous bore. His friendship was a consolation beyond measure in times when by and large he remained a precious memory ever since.

But with all his array of talents Dicky Buckle presented problems. There was not simply the ever-present possibility that he would be mactial or, up facing a court-martial or earning a posthumous Victoria Cross. There was a more serious anxiety, how such a *fin de siècle* figure would face the long litleness of life in a post-war society likely to contain few of those warm, rosy-pools in which such elegant, courtesan fauna could survive. But there was something very much worse, Dicky Buckle was not really a dandy. It had all been done before, quite often. There had been Wilde, there had been Fribank, there had been Proust, there had been Cocteau, with dozens of their lesser imitators. And though it might initially be hugely exhilarating to discover, as he did at Marlborough, that he belonged to the noble company of Aesthetes and was not the only one of this kind, a life spent establishing, outraging and entertaining the bourgeois was not likely in

the long run to prove very satisfying - nor was the run likely to prove very long. Within the dandy one sensed a deeply serious person struggling to get out. There was little if any of the self-destructive nihilism that distinguished so many of his kind. At root there was clearly something very much tougher and more enduring, and this book helps to explain what it was.

On his mother's side Buckle had the full dandy inheritance; a long line of *hochwollgeborner*, once distinguished but increasingly decrepit ancestors, mainly Cravens and Greaves, the mere mention of whose names could make a party go, tram-rush for the exits. Here we are given a full and sober account of them, garnished with references to such slightly more distant kinsmen as Lord Burlington, the Blessed Marquis Chamley, Braithwaite and Buckles; Lord Medici. But on the other side were tough service gentry, two generations of professional soldiers and a grand-mother who asked nothing more from life than to bear men children to die for their country. This formidable matriarch is the Most Upsetting Woman of the title. The core of the book is about her upbringing in the deep peace of the Victorian countryside, her service to her family and her country, her deep faith that this world was "only prep school", and that death was unimportant, and her loving relationship with her extraordinary grandson in whom, curiously enough, she never lost faith in spite of all his eccentricities and apparent failures. Lily Buckle was a superb and prolific letter-writer, who knew exactly how to amuse, and tactfully to advise, a boy at school or a young officer on campaign; and though he occasionally struck him as being "too lavish in her readiness to lay down the lives of her grandsons", Dicky warmly reciprocated her love - not just because Proust had done her, he kept himself tidy and was, children, even his grandfather the General said at the end of his life, "Well, I am pleased with Dick. He is turning out far better than I expected".

Around this relationship Dicky

George III. (The only question is whether Benn will apply his unusual practice of tape-recording people while talking to them, when summoned to the Palace.)

The author's advice to the unions is cursory, but mild in tone. He offers them freedom from incomes policy, restoration of legal immunities, a share in company policy enough to make the City shiver, but nothing that goes beyond the elementary necessities of political inducement. The unions are to have what they cannot be prevented from having: a sound policy. But, hark to the note of the true Benn, the liberal idealist of Asquith's day, which rings out in a plea for picketing "to be seen in its educational context" and that "the less it can be presented as a mere show of force the better". Nice people, these Home Counties boys from good homes, but do they understand what boots are for? And, even more incredibly, Benn suggests that trade-union officials should be subject to re-selection and all the democratic disciplines, which will cause grim mirth along the Euston Road. It really amounts to this, that except in specifically union matters Benn wants the union activists to turn their minds to community politics, to "a wider perspective", to being honorary young social science graduates, and, if you please, to keep fairly quiet while Benn administers capitalism in a way which he will describe as socialism.

It is not only here that one detects an element of fudging. Over both defence and the EEC, Benn chooses his words carefully, and a little surprisingly. His line on the EEC has changed before, and one can hardly say it could not change once again. He began as an opponent, because a supporter in the late 1960s, and sat on the fence in 1971 when Heath actually took us in. It was a matter of regret to the Left in Bristol that Benn would not lift a finger against the EEC at the time when it might have made some difference. Benn then invented the referendum, as vitally necessary on so great an issue. He now, as we understand it, is committed to taking Britain out of the EEC, but this time it must be without the referendum which previously was a *sine qua non*. If I have failed to render Benn's position exactly in some particulars, it is that high art always loses something at the hands of journalism.

A cloud no bigger than a man's hand now appears. We are not exactly going to leave the EEC; not exactly. We are going to do something rather different, called in the small print "Repealing Section II of the European Communities Act, 1972". This means taking a populist bask at the law-making and tax functions of the EEC, while remaining in whatever ways suit us, food perhaps excluded, within the western European economic bloc. Benn does not exactly say this, but it probably matters more that he does not exclude it. In confirmation, there is the mellowness of the good European in his utterances. "It may be too soon", he says with gritty realism, "to think of the summoning of a Pan-European People's Congress..." but he pins his hopes on the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, and on a "Council of Continental Europe". Underneath the cultivated vagueness, what is going on here is a masterly use of Powellite constitutional finickings about EEC infringement of self-government. This is a Labour chauvinism over the question of keeping the essential economic link with the EEC alive. A clever fudge, worthy of Mr Healey.

On defence Mr Benn again has to be read rather carefully. While supporting the official Labour line of a non-nuclear defence policy, he hints at approval for the Swiss idea of a Swiss army. With all respect to the Swiss, this is strange; if the CND thought they would have to do a fortnight in camp each year as a consequence of nuclear disarmament, their numbers would indeed dwindle. The bomb is bad, but ear-wigs in a sleeping-bag are worse. Yet in Benn's view, "a determined people is the best guarantee against permanent domination from outside". As far as one can see, Benn envisages non-nuclear war against a Russia which would be under overwhelming pressure to bomb our cities, finish it quickly, and save

needless Russian deaths. This is standard CND foreign and defence policy, and the charge against it and Benn is that it is far too anti-Russian. If we are going to capitulate in the name of safety, which is indeed probably the wisest course, we must do the thing properly, and attach ourselves firmly to Russia's skirts, with no nonsense about independence. Benn dreams of a past world, of Britain, bloody and resolute, of CND marchers out of Henty. He writes, against oppression is guerrilla warfare and civil resistance" - that these "offer us the most practicable defence strategy" against predators, and that "a determined resistance to attack would prevent conquest and eject attackers..." Who would have thought that the old man had such dreams of blood in him? The experiment of a nuclear-free zone in a war against a nuclear power has after all been tried, at Hiroshima. If Benn and the CND wish to repeat that to doing - all we ask is that they remember to adjust their foreign policy beforehand, and not, as the Japanese did, afterwards. Finlandization is too important a task to be entrusted to such fiery Churchillian defenders of the homeland as Mr Benn.

Part of Mr Benn's following consists of young men with beards. For them, too, he provides. They have a *Udolpho*-like desire to be terrified. He makes the compulsory reference to the danger of a military coup. He reveals that when in the Cabinet he was never told the basis on which US missiles in Britain could be fired. The basis is not hard to guess, but it seems on the whole reassuring that such information was not given to a seer of the future and lover of the tape-recorder. He shocks us with the news that British security men twice tried to recruit him, once at Oxford, once as a young MP. He relates with conscious pride that he declined to serve his country, one more testimony to his being one of the least suspect figures in high politics, for a Marxist "sleeper" would have jumped at the chance. He tells us the usual boring stuff about our telephones being tapped. The objection to such a thing is not a funny prejudice, a little world, which it may well be, but that those who scream loudest about infringements of liberty are so often authoritarians in their own areas of power. Benn also reveals, what the world well knows, that his relations with civil servants were unhappy. For ways that are dark and for tricks that are vain, the heathen Chinese has much to learn from the British mandarin, at any rate in Benn's eyes. Perhaps this tells us something about Benn. The media, especially television news, are press dissidents, a discovery made by the very bearded-sounding Glasgow University Media Group, who may not be aware that Benn's relations with the media have sometimes been rather unconstructive on his side. Conspiracy here, conspiracy there; Benn, like anyone else in a free economy, produces what the market will bear.

All this is good sound stuff. Of course we are an American colony; that is a High Tory truism of the 1950s. Of course we are also an EEC colony, a Powellite truism of the 1970s. Of course post-war government depended on a corporatist consensus which has now broken down. That is a Thatcherite truism. Of course we are the flies to wait on boys where the IMF is concerned. Of course central government breeds too much dubious patronage, again a view Benn shares with Thatcherite anti-collectivists. Of course Whitehall is too centralized and secretive; but have not the Liberals been saying that for years? Is Mr Benn then simply catching up with what everyone else is saying? On the whole, yes; but remember that is a politician's job.

Twenty years ago that other notorious charismatic left liberal, E. P. Thompson, gave his distinctly feeble definition of revolution. It was remarkably like Benn's shopping list of today: the House of Lords, Sandhurst, Aldermaston, the Stock Exchange, the press lords were to go, targets rather of inverted snobbery and of the Nonconformist conscience than of socialism. As Perry Anderson pointed out in *Arguments within*

English Marxism, virtually all the measures enumerated are compatible with the maintenance of capitalist relations of production and the preservation of the bourgeois state. This judgment certainly applies to Benn, who frequently argues as if socialism simply meant a departure from a free-market economy, plus a certain amount of moralism. Socialism at times seems to mean capitalism run by Benn. It is significant that his only hard constructive thinking in this volume concerns a detailed plan for turning the security services into a liberal, open institution - an issue which is emotive, significant to journalists and young graduates, and entirely marginal to the questions of capitalism and the working class. One can only be a little tickled about how easily the anti-parliamentary Left have once again been drawn into parliamentarianism and the necessities of an old-fashioned leadership campaign.

In two ways Mr Benn's truisms ring hollow. He simply assumes that more democracy would somehow improve things. It might produce, in quite unpredictable ways, some difference in pattern, but for better or for worse? As with the Liberals' quaint belief in PR as the one thing necessary, the charm of the prospectus lies in nobody being allowed to know what benefits it will confer. The *Arguments* of the title are grumbles, not arguments, and one comes away unenlightened as to whether there is a case for more democracy. The other point which rings hollow is some nerve to bring out a snow-white text of democratic idealism, at the same time as unabashedly running for Labour deputy leader (in effect, for premier) on the basis of firm denial of voting rights to individual trade-unionists or individual Labour Party members.

By Michael Howard

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the long run to prove very satisfying - nor was the run likely to prove very long. Within the dandy one sensed a deeply serious person struggling to get out. There was little if any of the self-destructive nihilism that distinguished so many of his kind. At root there was clearly something very much tougher and more enduring, and this book helps to explain what it was.

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Around this relationship Dicky

Buckle has written an enchanting book, which combines a portrait of a happy Victorian family, a discreetly revealing account of his disastrously brilliant boyhood, and a superb description, based on his wife's diaries, of his adventures during the Italian campaign. It is beautifully written, often deeply moving, and very funny. So good is it, indeed, that one grieves with mixed feelings the news that there will be five more volumes to follow. It will not be easy to keep up the standard. The strength of this volume lies in its sympathetic reconstruction of events that happened before the author was born and in the exuberant portrait of Buckle at war. The rest of his life has certainly been eventful, but passed largely in metropolitan social and artistic circles whose affairs will be very much closer to the general than if he can set the world against the background of its times and make, as Proust succeeded in doing, the story of his adventures within it both a microcosm reflecting vaster social changes and an illustration of the eternal truths about human relationships; if he can take all the glittering Craven material he has accumulated and impose on it a solid discipline; then he will certainly succeed in his declared ambition of writing a masterpiece. Anyhow he has certainly made an excellent start.

In *People's History and Social Theory* (417pp. Routledge. £10.95; paperback £6.95; 0-7100 0765 5), Raphael Samuel has assembled a collection of papers first presented at a History Workshop held at Ruskin College, Oxford, in December 1979. The book aims to introduce the general reader to recent work in the expanding field of socialist history and includes sections on "People's History", "Local History", "Oral Tradition", "Peasant Studies", "Feminism", "Labour History", "Sexual Politics", and "Culturalism". Among the contributors are Perry Anderson who writes on Communist party history, Stuart Hall, Sheila Rowbotham and E. P. Thompson (on the politics of theory), as well as all the other writers, extends the discussion to take in international issues.

مكتبة

Anthologising the absurd

By Janet Morgan

MARI PRICHARD (Compiler):
Guests & Hosts
92pp. Oxford University Press, £3.95.
0 19 214115 5

JEANNE MACKENZIE (Compiler):
Cycling
110pp. Oxford University Press, £3.95.
0 19 214117 1

CLAIRE TOMALIN (Compiler):
Parents & Children
91pp. Oxford University Press, £3.95.
0 19 214123 6

THEODORA FITZGIBBON (Compiler):
The Pleasures of the Table
92pp. Oxford University Press, £3.95.
0 19 214120 1

A disenchanted businessman recently described the Chancellor of the Exchequer as "frantically clutching at straws in the wind". Perhaps this is doing the same thing but it does seem miraculous that there should be published a series of attractively jacketed, intelligently planned, locally printed books, each with a short index, legible type on good paper, and with only two misprints in the first four volumes (in *Cycling*, where on page 84 and 94 Ivan "Hitch" resembles a noxious weed). Four pounds each may seem rather steep, but not when compared to the price of periodicals or petrol. Indeed, the only reason for not buying Small Oxford Books as a portent is that they are all anthologies: cleverly compiled by sharp-eyed ladies (this may not be compulsory) with an abundant data-base or instructive friends (the "anthologist", Mari Prichard gloomily recalls, quickly learns to dread help of the "I'm sure there's something in Dickens" variety), but anthologies none the less. Refreshing, then, but recycled.

The most successful of these four titles are *Guests and Hosts* and *Cycling*. Why should this be so? Not simply because the first is about a relationship (*Pupils and Teachers* might work, just; *Management and Shopfloor* wouldn't) and the second about an invention (*Television* won't do; *The Newspaper* is possible) but because there is something absurd about this specific relationship and that particular invention. What holds more opportunities for mishap than issuing or accepting an invitation? What is as ridiculous as the lurching and tumbling and, once the machine is mastered, the proselytizing rhapsodies of the bicyclist? And the idiotic activity or spectacle is the one best suited to the anthologist's snippits and quips. No need for the editor to break up long ineffective passages or to elucidate obscurities; and no strain on the reader, who does not mind his attention being distracted as he is drawn from one text to another, since he is not being required to concentrate in the first place. In *Guests and Hosts*, for instance, we move from the telegram Lord Charles Beresford (1846-1919) sent to the Prince of Wales, "Very sorry can't come. Lie follows by post", to the letter in which Edmund Gosse described "the most charming guest", Dr Oliver Wendell Holmes, who "has the most delightful readiness in going to bed - has been there twice already today - before dinner". We are given Anthony Powell's story of Maurice Bowra's terrible experience at Garsington, when Lady Ottoline Morrell came down to breakfast: "The parlourmaid fixed her eyes on Bowra. The toast was when he came down, in lady . . ." and Michael Holroyd's memorable visit to Lytton Strachey's brother James: "In our glasses there showed a faint blush of red wine from the Wine Society, but I was the only one who so much as sipped any. My hosts solemnly tipped their down the sink at the conclusion of the meal."

As for *Cycling*, we are led from the warnings of the *Northern Wheel*, August 17, 1892 - "In young girls the bones of the pelvis are not able to resist the tension to ride a bicycle,

and so may become more or less distorted in shape, with perhaps in after life resulting distress" - to the disillusioning of Bernstein and Woodward in *All the President's Men*, 1974: "He had picked up a profoundly disturbing piece of information that day: Magdalen was a bike freak. Bernstein had trouble swallowing the information that a bicycle nut could be a Watergate bugger." We move from the rules of the Cambridge University Bicycle Club 1876 - "If a horse, on meeting a bicycle, shows signs of restiveness, it is not always wise to dismount at once. To dismount suddenly is more likely to frighten a horse than to continue riding slowly talking to the horse as you do so" - to the Regulations of the Army Council Manual of 1907 - "The position of the cyclist at attention is the same as that of the dismounted soldier, except that he will grasp the left steering handle with his left hand, and place the right hand at the point of the saddle, elbow to the rear". (An improvement, anyway, on the arrangements prevailing in the Cycle Manoeuvres in Brighton District, August 4, 5, 6, 1900, on which Major-General Maurice reported that, on the last day, "2nd Lieutenant Clark met with a very serious accident in consequence of this sword becoming entangled in the cycle. In my judgement this accident illustrates the extreme uselessness and danger of the sword as at present worn by Cycle officers. I think it ought to be abandoned altogether as a cyclist's weapon.")

Claire Tomalin has a more difficult task. The passages she quotes are long and thoughtful; they invite us to consider the delights and terrors of the relation between parents and children, and we cannot skip easily from one extract to another. Moreover, as Mrs Tomalin explains in her introduction, over the centuries there were important changes in attitudes in the obligations and expectations which parents and children were held to enjoy. The editor of this anthology has therefore had to organize her extracts and frame her linking material so that the reader is discreetly made aware of these "shifts in taste", and at every stage the editor's tone, too, must be exactly right, understanding but not indulgent, moved but not sentimental, critical but calm. Thus we are given John Locke's *Thoughts Concerning Education* of 1693: "These native propensities, these prevalences of constitution, are not to be cured by rules, or a direct contest . . ." - and, in contrast, Susanna Wesley's advice on child-rearing, written in 1732 - "In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will and bring them to an obedient temper . . ."

We are reminded of Fanny Burney's amazement at the way in which her son endured his inoculation, in 1797, at the age of two and a quarter, looking "at the blood with great curiosity in the most profound silent rumination", and of Mrs Ramsay's description, in *In The Light House*, of her children "Netted in their coats like birds among cherries and raspberries". As well as familiar lines from Edmund Gosse and George Eliot ("Maggie never forgot any of these moments when her father took her part"), Claire Tomalin offers Michael Frayn's poem "When I Was Your Age" and an anonymous carol, already known in the seventeenth century.

Then howled down the highest tree
Unto his mother's hand:
Then she cried, "See Joseph,
I have cherries at command".
It is a touching collection, most delicately assembled. This little book is full of wisdom and humanity, like the lines it takes from Coventry Patmore's *The Toys*:

For on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a redwooded stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,
And six or seven shells,
A bottle of bluebells,

And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.

And *The Pleasures of the Table*? This works least well, for an obvious reason. Thackeray's remark which closes the book - "Next to eating good dinners, a healthy man with a benevolent turn of mind, must like, I think, to read about them" - is not completely foolish, since there is much pleasure to be had from looking through recipe books or restaurant guides, even when there is no pressing need to cook a meal or choose where to dine. But there are limits to the number of descriptions one can stomach of food enjoyed by other people, even when these are as mellifluous as Chao Hui's *Summons of the Soul* (12th century BC-221 AD):

"Jade-like wine, honey flavoured, fills the winged cups . . . or as fanciful as the picture of the delights of Paradise in Teleclides' *Amphigyrus* - "Roasted thrushes and forcemeat bulls flew down men's throats as if spontaneously. There were sounds, too, of chesspieces clamped in hungry men's jaws . . ." After a while, this sort of thing begins to sound either pretentious (compare the *Good Food Guide*, or some of Bernard Levin's pieces in *The Times*), or, quoted here, André Simon: "mellotender, symmetrical circles of roast pork, with a centre piece of truffle, and an understore of garlic and the jellified gravy from the joint") or dull, as in di Lampedusa's account of the macaroni pie served at dinner in Sicily in the 1860s: "The burnished gold of the crusts, the fragrance of sugar and cinnamon they exuded, were but preludes to the delights released from the interior when the knife broke the crust; first came a smoky liver with arum, then chicken livers, hard-boiled eggs, sliced ham, chicken and truffles in masses of piping hot glistening macaroni, to which the meat juice gave an exquisite hue of suede".

Theodora Fitzgibbon has done her best. There are sternly helpful linking passages, on eating habits in Imperial Rome, the use of the fork at the court of Louis XIV, sixteenth-century breakfasts in Lent, and the consumption of drink, supplied free, on board ships of the P & O Line. She also offers us some deliberately funny passages; take Rossini, congratulating Patti on her singing: "Madame, I have only cried twice in my life: once when I dropped a wing of truffled chicken into Lake Como, and once, when for the first time I heard you sing." This is one of the discoveries which the assiduous anthologist places among familiar treasures, to surprise and please the reader.

Beverly Nichols's description of Randolph Hearst's buckskin coat of cavilar and the Emperor Julian's attack on beer ("Who made you and from what? By the true Bacchus I know you not! He smells of nectar! But you smell of goat"), along with Parson Woodforde's "Rogation Day" dinners and the Reverend Sydney Smith's praise for Sauce Tartare are all included (but Theodora Fitzgibbon does not give that other well-loved passage, Smith's verse describing the mixing of a salad, nor, indeed, an extract from Charles Lamb's essay on roast pork).

Guests and Hosts has Daisy Ashford ("He was a lonely man in a remote spot and he liked people and parties but he did not know many"), Kenneth Grahame's chapter where Ratty forages in Mole's store cupboard, and Margaret Asquith's instruction to the butler, "Tell them I would rather die than come". Along with A. G. Macdonnell's story of Mr Huggins and the twelve suitcases:

Take fifty and they'll treat you like shoes, the Duke of Westminster . . . odd shoes, books, newspapers, bits of rope, photographs and pictures were all crammed into another suitcase and labelled by Mr. Huggins "Amateur Theatricals", and one entire suitcase was filled with old newspapers and solemnly



"How merrily we live that doctor's be, we humbug the public and pocket the fee" - a watercolour by Robert Dighton from *Life, Times and Recorded Works of Robert Dighton (1752-1814)* by Dennis Rose (95pp. 50 plates. Element Books, The Old Brewery, Tisbury, Salisbury, Wiltshire, £8.95. 0 9507579 0 X). Dighton progressed from offering "conceal Wells to illustrating Sterne" ("Positive Drawings Representing the Most Interesting, Sentimental and Humorous Scenes in Tristram Shandy" and *Comper* (John Gillyn). He also had great success with his "humorous titles" which include genre scenes, a series on the professions as illustrated above, biblical and theatrical scenes, and topical subjects such as the attempts on the life of George III, the refugees from the French Revolution stranded at Dover and the military manoeuvres at Bughshot in 1801 which gave rise to the nursery rhyme about the Grand Old Duke of York. The book includes works by Dighton's three sons who were also successful artists producing popular prints signed simply "Dighton".

corded up and sealed and labelled, in huge scarlet letters, "Disquises: Secret". It was useless for Donald to protest . . .

We stumble across the letter King Louis Philippe's daughter, Louise, Queen of the Belgians, wrote to Queen Victoria in 1844 "My father is one of the beings most easy to please, satisfy and to accommodate" - plus a list of detailed instructions as to his diet, sleeping habits, exercise, etc. Katherine Whitehorn's Disquises, "One host I heard of appears to fall asleep; he then wakes with a jerk and says, 'Darling, I think we should be going now'. Alas, I suppose you wouldn't work it too often", and an awful tale told by Mari Prichard herself of "one don's wife who was left to wind up an undergraduate tea-party while her husband went to chapel; she grew so desperate for conversation as to be induced to tearing up and burning old underwear in the grate, so as to comment on the different colours of the flames" (odd; this reviewer seems to remember that episode. Surely not . . .).

In *Cycling* we are reminded of hilarious stories by H. G. Wells and Jerome K. Jerome, the first lessons endured by Leonard Woolf, George Bernard Shaw, of Laurie Lee's mother's stratagems ("an assistant, specially briefed, would tear

through the shop, out the side door, and catch her in his arms") and of Bertrand Russell's celebrated reaction (" . . . and suddenly, as I was riding along a country road, I realised that I no longer loved Alys . . ."). But here, too, are new delights: William Sarsenay, "The action of the imagination brings home to the potential in all things"; Alfred Jarry's *The Passion Considered as an Uphill Bicycle Race* (1909): "Jesuw down for the third time at the eleventh turn"; and José Antonio Viera-Guillo of Chile: "Socialism can only come riding on a bicycle". Flann O'Brien's bicycles become half-human and his humans half-bicycles in their veins: "He will walk snailly always and never sit down and he will lean against the wall with his elbow out and stay like that all night in his kitchen instead of going to bed". There you are - bicycles always were eccentric. James Joyce puts it best, in *Ulysses*:

His eyes followed the high figure in homespun, beard and bicycle, a listening woman at his side. Only weegeobles and fruit. Don't eat a beef-steak. . . . Her stockings all leave over her ankles. I detect that: so tasteless they are. Those literary ethereal people all Dreamy, cloudy, symbolistic. Esthetes they are.

A third revised edition of *Flags of the World*, edited by E. M. C. Barricloud and W. G. Crampton, which first appeared over eighty years ago, has just been published (260pp. Frederick Warne, £12.50, 0 7232 279 1). The 1981 edition, which is based on that of 1978, has been substantially revised and brought up to date with cross-references in the main text to a supplement containing recent changes in national flags. The book has an introduction on the origins of flags and includes separate chapters on the United Kingdom, North America, South America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania and Australia, as well as covering the flags of international organizations, signal flags, flags worn by merchant ships and yacht flags. It is illustrated with line drawings and colour plates.

BIOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE

GREVEL LINDOP:
The Opium-Eater
A Life of Thomas De Quincey
433pp. Dent, £12.
0 461 04358 7

To call a biography of De Quincey *The Opium-Eater* is to hint at trouble. As Grevel Lindop remarks, if ever a man was a one-book man, it was De Quincey, and that single great success, *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, has already done the business of any future biography in a manner hard to compete with. There's no getting away from De Quincey's version, which is often the sole authority. It's as though an academic had elected to write the *Life of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, using Shakespeare as a source.

It helps that there are good things De Quincey left out. At various times, he wrote about the leading literary celebrities he knew, especially Wordsworth and Coleridge, but not about what it was like to be a literary journalist in the first half of the nineteenth century, earning a precarious living in Edinburgh by writing for *Blackwood's* and *Tait's*. *The Opium-Eater* would be worth possessing if only for its evocation of that gruelling existence.

But it also has De Quincey, who makes an absorbing subject. The desolating story of his childhood and youth bears any number of retellings, though the best insights remain De Quincey's own: he noted the bereavements and betrayals with the freshness of an age newly sensitive to the world of the child. His father, Thomas Quincey, a rising Manchester businessman, died of tuberculosis when the future writer was not quite eight, leaving a widow and children supposedly provided for. In fact, the trustees mismanaged the estate, and there was never quite enough for the socially-ambitious Mrs Quincey and her wayward sons.

Grevel Lindop follows previous biographers (and De Quincey himself) in disliking Mrs Quincey, and no wonder. She subscribed to the view, common in the late eighteenth century, that the greatest danger in child-rearing was to spoil the child. Rather than have Thomas's head turned by success at Bath Grammar School, she removed her son from the only satisfactory educational experience he had, and worse, she withheld approval and any expression of maternal warmth so systematically that Thomas and his next brother Richard look like clear cases of emotional deprivation, two miserable children who as teenagers both ran away. Her tone in writing to Thomas can be quite awful; no wonder he sometimes falls into a strain of pompous, pitiful self-justification in reply:

You would scarcely have addressed me, if I had been a member of Parliament or a distinguished Barrister or a Judge or Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the tone which you hold in your last letter which addresses me sometimes as a baby and sometimes as a poor crazy nervous decayed gentleman boarded out by his friends in a retired situation where he may sit brooding and moping by the fire-side and not disgrace his family by a more public exhibition. If I, instead of labouring for years to mature a great scheme of philosophy and education, had pushed myself forward in the paths of common vulgar ambition . . . I am sensible that I should have experienced a very different treatment from all my female relatives.

His main effort to compensate was to select an adoptive father-figure in William Wordsworth, to whom he wrote in 1803 at the age of eighteen boldly requesting friendship, rather as Boswell co-opted Johnson.

The Wordsworth-De Quincey relationship was never as successful as the Johnson-Boswell one, because it never worked reciprocally. Wordsworth must have wanted something

De Quincey had to give, perhaps homage, or he would not have responded by inviting him to stay before he had seen him. Nor would he have set his visitor up in a satellite household in Dove Cottage, nor entrusted to him the task of seeing his pamphlet on the Convention of Cintra through the press. But De Quincey in his early twenties, unlovely, failed to become indispensable. Wordsworth and Coleridge were prepared to use him in lesser tasks and to borrow his books, but they didn't respect him (Wordsworth didn't listen when he talked) or even altogether like him. Crab Robinson indicates what was probably wrong with him at this time - "He is too much an admirer and disciple to have anything of his own". De Quincey succeeded, when he succeeded at all, only with the women of the Wordsworth circle - Dorothy, Mary and Sara Hutchinson - and with the children. He went out of his way to be kind to the children, writing notes to them, buying presents, and insisting that he would teach young John Wordsworth Latin by his own special method. In fact, as Dorothy Wordsworth quite quickly noticed, the course of Latin lessons never properly materialized. De Quincey was genuinely nice with children, but the time he spent with them always turned out less than he had promised, and far less than his grand educational schemes would have required.

Before long Wordsworth must have tangled with De Quincey. He and Hazlitt were much more in being insecure to the point of paranoia, and outrageously demanding of their acquaintance. They also as journalists had an insatiable thirst for copy, so that the friendship of the great man became more useful dead than alive. The cuttiest stories known about Wordsworth (and Coleridge too) come from one or other of them, and De Quincey's are classic. Almost everything he printed about Wordsworth denigrates him. De Quincey's own, very personal, sense of disappointment translates itself into the physical description he gave of the poet in *Tait's* in 1839, in the series of articles afterwards better known as *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets* - that his manners were bad, his dress slovenly, his handling of books philistine, and his movements ungainly - "Wordsworth was, upon the whole, not a well-made man". The debunking extends mercilessly to the family circle: Mrs Wordsworth "was generally pronounced very plain" and had "a considerable obliquity of vision", commonly known as a squint. With apparent frankness, De Quincey admits that his account of Wordsworth may appear coloured "with a spirit of pique or illiberality".

I shall acknowledge then, on my own part - and I feel that I might even make the same acknowledgment on the part of Professor Wilson, - that to neither of us . . . has Wordsworth made those returns of friendship and kindness which most firmly I maintain that we were entitled to have challenged. More by far in sorrow than in anger . . . I acknowledge myself to have been long alienated from Wordsworth; sometimes even I feel a rising emotion of hostility - nay, something, I fear, too nearly akin to vindictive hatred. Strange revolution of the human heart!

But was De Quincey entitled to expect so much in return for his youthful discipleship? Lindop traces his bitterness to Wordsworth's "cool disapproval" of his affair and marriage with the farmer's daughter, Margaret Simpson, in 1817, and makes the plausible suggestion that Margaret's death in 1837 brought De Quincey's mind back to the Wordsworths' slights: "The ear is deaf that should have been soled by the sound of welcome." But while Margaret's death may account for the widower's publishing his unfriendly commentary on Wordsworth, he had clearly been harbouring it since the

offence was given. Under the guise of complaining about Lakeland gossip, he managed in 1821 to convey to Keats's friend Richard Woodhouse that Wordsworth had not been very fond of his little daughter Kate, but might have been too fond of his sister Dorothy. He told Woodhouse of tales current in Lakeland that:

he was himself the father of Mrs. Wordsworth's child that died. . . . The grounds for this fiction, were the plainness of the child's appearance, the comparative want of fondness of . . . Wordsworth for the little thing, and the opium eater's partiality for it, and grief at its death Again there was an unnatural tale current, and which the Opium Eater had heard even in London, of Wordsworth having been intimate with his own sister which De Quincey thought had arisen because of the poet's habit of kissing his sister on meeting and putting - as he did with all female relatives. Both stories he vigorously denied.

Quite what Wordsworth did to deserve such a campaign of insinuation and vilification remains a bit of a mystery. He was prim with friends who became addicted to opium or seduced local girls, as Coleridge and Hazlitt had already found out. But, after De Quincey had offended on both counts, Wordsworth did after all in 1818 help him to get the editorship of the *Westmorland Gazette*, which launched him on his journalistic career and was thus one of the most useful favours he ever received. De Quincey was not good at remembering such acts of friendship when they did him his way. Professor (John) Wilson, "Christopher North", the editor of *Blackwood's*, lent him money and wooed him with exemplary patience and sympathy throughout 1820-21, only to see De Quincey send his manuscript, the articles which became *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, to the rival *London Magazine*. In this long biography, there are no anecdotes of De Quincey himself helping the career of a younger writer, though for close on forty years he was eminent enough to have done it. He emerges rather like a character in one of Maria Edgeworth's *Fashionable Tales*, an egotistical French countess who takes favours off her English friend as a kind of tithe, without any sense that the other person's generosity does her credit. "You see it is her humour - English humours must not be trifled with - her humour, you see, is to give".

Like many egotists, De Quincey developed a sweet and gentle manner, so that other people ended up loving to give. In fact he displayed a real talent for exacting the respect, affection and support his mother had starved him of. His relations with his children, especially his three daughters, have a peculiar fascination, and is a story well told by Lindop, without intrusive moralizing. At the beginning of his literary career, in the 1820s, De Quincey was desperately hard on because he could not write fast enough to keep himself and his large brood. He was pursued by creditors and spent the 1830s in and out of the debtors' sanctuary around Holyrood House. (This was a kind of open-plan Marshalsea run on distinctive Scottish lines, which included a strictly enforced rest for debtors on the Sabbath.) De Quincey avoided giving clues to his pursuers by using his children to carry his copy to the offices of *Blackwood's* or *Tait's*. He would arrange to meet them late at night in alleys off the Canongate or on the George the Fourth bridge, to the misery of his youngest daughter Florence, "my heart rushing into my mouth with the natural terrors of footsteps approaching and rushing down again into my shoes when left to quiet and the ghosts". Throughout most of their childhood he could not openly live with his children for any length of time. When their mother died, his eldest daughter Margaret had to take over the task of scraping together money for food and rent. But much

of the hardship the children endured was unnecessary, as Lindop shows: De Quincey could often have paid off troublesome debts with the money he received from his journalism. Had he chosen to do so, and all his life he wastefully paid rent on several apartments at the same time. His children knew this, and even suspected that he didn't really want to settle down in a stable noisy household. He liked best to be on his own in some cell piled high with books and papers. He loved his children, but they dropped quickly out of his mind, and as the Wordsworths had done, and as the London waif and the teenage prostitute Ann drop out of his life in the *Confessions*.

His daughters' suspicions that he could manage on his own were never really acted upon. All three seemed to like playing Little Dorrit to his father of the Marshalsea; the spinster Emily also, as Lindop remarks, enjoyed playing Emma to his Mr Woodhouse. The other two postponed marrying, to the ages of thirty-six and twenty-eight, in order to keep the home fires burning for Papa. They were lucky not to have been seduced for their pains. De Quincey became increasingly eccentric in later life, and no doubt increasingly endearing, and a number of stories are told of how he set fire at intervals to his study, his waste-paper basket, his latest review and even his hair.

The children of artists have often had to make sacrifices for a parent's Muse, and in De Quincey's case something worthwhile came of it: over the years he turned into a practised and intermittently brilliant writer.

Constructs and confessions

By Marilyn Butler

De Quincey was able to use the format of the literary biography effectively to clarify some of the most interesting issues of this rich, tough career. One is the controversy De Quincey himself raised, of the relationship between his creativity and his opium-taking. De Quincey has always laid himself open to the suspicions of moralists, since his handling of the topic of opium is equivocal. On the one hand, he warns of the pains of addiction, and represents his life as distinguished above all by suffering; on the other hand, he attributes to opium a heightening of experience, what he describes in *Suspensio Proflundis* as the amplification of the sense of space and above all of time. Lindop leaves on one side the issue of what effect prolonged opium-taking had on De Quincey's faculties, as a problem the medical profession has yet finally to solve. But he does show that De Quincey's best periods of creativity followed his two most sustained efforts to give up the drug, when, after painfully enduring the withdrawal symptoms, he stabilized his daily dose at a level well below what he had been used to. He worked best in the early 1820s, when he produced *The Confessions*, and in 1844, the era of *Suspensio Proflundis* (1844), *The English Mail-Coach* (1849) and the masterpiece describing the Williams and McKean murders which he added in 1854 to *On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts*.

But when he has to confront De Quincey directly as a writer, Lindop begins to encounter real difficulties. His format is no longer a help; most literary biographers experience awkwardness in moving between narrative and literary criticism. In

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A version of Versailles

By Lindsay Duguid

LOUIS AUCHINCLOSS:

The Cat and the King
183pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£6.50.
0 297 77989 3

Louis Auchincloss's latest novel, set in France at the time of Louis XIV, is dedicated to "Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis who persuaded me that Versailles was still a valid source for fiction". The recommendation to some extent explains why he has chosen this setting for his twenty-second novel. The lure of high society, whether ancient or modern, has always been something he has found difficult to resist.

The Cat and the King is the Duc de Saint-Simon's personal history, "a record of the thing above all else I had resolved to keep out of my memoirs - namely myself." It purports to be the true record of what lay behind his more famous chronicle of the reign of the Sun King and is presented as an informal self-portrait which incidentally sheds light on the known facts of history somewhat in the manner of Mary Renault's novels (or, more recently, Gore Vidal's *Creation*). There is some play with the leather chest in which the memoirs are to be stored but the book does not have any sort of false "editor's note" explaining how the Duke's papers came to be found. Little time is wasted on any historical preamble and Saint-Simon introduces himself as a hussy, venal aristocrat, repulsive with power and concerned with the preservation of hierarchy. One of his reasons for writing has been a desire to preserve a memory of the old order: "But have I not heard a young niece of my wife's confuse Louise de la Vallière with Madame de Montespan?"

This faintly homoeopathic courtier (he has known plenty of women including the great Madame de Maintenon, the king's morganatic spouse, who are capable of being bad-tempered, even when everything is going their way) picks his way skillfully through the factions and alliances at court in order to obtain status and sinecures. He is helped by his wife Gabrielle, who provides the motivating power and some disconcertingly acute observations. The action turns on issues such as the legitimization of the royal bastards, the advisability or otherwise of proposed marriages, and the conduct of some very off-stage foreign wars. These provide the material for Saint-Simon's doubts about the sovereignty of the royal house and the fallibility of the king. There are also many minor plots, intrigues and pieces of gossip concerning such figures as Monsieur, Monseigneur, Conti, Madame de Montespan and the Duc de Savonne who are known to us from the history books but who are here described with a mixture of respect and cynicism which nicely points up the strange combination of rigid etiquette and gross familiarity which characterizes the court.

Louis XIV himself is portrayed as an effigy of regal dignity and power, whose authority almost justifies the hysterical deference paid by Saint-Simon and the court. He is a great man with no apparent personality who induces awe by virtue of his kingship.

The king seemed never to stammer, never to be reduced, like the rest of us, to an "er" or an "ah". He chewed his words like his food, slowly and deliberately. Had I not had carefully to watch my step in keeping abreast of his chair, I should not have taken my fascinated gaze from those great glassy eyes. I attempted now to convey to the king some sense of the satisfaction that these compliments brought me, but he raised his hand to indicate that he wished to continue.

The levers and couleuvres, even the *chaise percée* of this figure, make an admirable centre for the eddies of gossip and intrigue which swirl round him.

Another factor which saves Saint-

Simon's concerns from seeming altogether ludicrous is the palace of Versailles itself. The glittering splendours are not described in detail, but there is an impression of myriad apartments, of endless corridors and, above all, of the great formal gardens which provide an image of civilization and its discontents. "It was as if some long tentacle of Le Notre's landscape gardening had reached out to recapture me from the tangled wilderness... across grassy swards and gravelled paths, up steps, past fountains and over terraces, the patterns becoming more meshed, more rigid, more complicated as I proceeded until I was delivered safely back to the heart of the great palace itself."

This is really as far as Auchincloss goes in evoking the era, and he has made a decision to have the characters speak in modern demotic American ("Madame de Maintenon drop-

ped her like a hot potato as soon as she picked up the last whiff of her ill-favour"). "Order, order, order - like those piddling gravel walks out there" which sometimes approaches the ridiculous. The family row, parties and weekends (Madie is described as though it were an exclusive New England country club), and the ladies with bad reputations familiar from Auchincloss's earlier novels, recall the Cibois rather than the Bourbons. But perhaps because Savonne is so clearly the Harvard room-mate and the throne room the Oval Office, the politicking comes through strongly. In the end Auchincloss appears to have taken little advantage of the setting so kindly suggested by Mrs Onassis. His interest is in the more universal workings of ambition; and, ignoring historical colour, he uses his undoubted skills to make the concerns of the characters worth taking seriously on their own terms.

Making bad

By Stoddard Martin

JOSEPH BELLESTRI:

The Sins of the Fathers
142pp. New York: Carlton Press.
\$7.75.
0 8062 1612 3

Angelo Ursino is born in Sicily in 1927, the year the Irish powers of Boston try Sacco and Vanzetti. Angelo's father, Mario, emigrates to America shortly after his son's birth. Mario expects to send for the family as soon as he is established, but the Depression intervenes, and it is not until 1946 that Angelo arrives in "the promised land". Used to the grinding poverty of Sicily, Angelo looks on with admiration as his father, who has made good running shrimp boats, bribes his way into the customs building and whisks his son off in a shiny new Chrysler.

The promised land is not a paradise, however. In America, it turns out, crime and violence are "practically synonymous" with Sicilians, in the way that usury and greed were in Europe with the Jews. The young man cannot get into medical school, in spite of the fact that he has a bachelor's degree from the finest university in the old country. Quickly he grows to resent the ignorant prejudice against his "nation of heroes, explorers, saints, poets, scientists and artists". He falls under the spell of Don Cuesare Corso, business partner of his father and power-broker in New Orleans.

Don Cuesare is five-foot-two and has paintings of Napoleon on his wall. He dresses sharply, is "a man of the world", and loves "the seduction of women of all ages". In him Angelo imagines the signs of greatness: "If he had channelled his energies

look positively Aristotelian. From where has it sprung, and how does it relate to more rational fears? More significantly, does the audience identify with the killer or his victims? As a lad, it certainly combines the maximum of nausea with the minimum of reason.

Brian Coffey has nevertheless created a compelling little fable, set in California, about the friendship that develops between a bookworm who enjoys vicarious horror and his high school idol who prefers the real thing. After a powerfully imagined hunt through a junkyard full of discarded cars, the story slightly peters out as the bookworm rather implausibly turns the tables on his sick friend, and the whole thing ends in a welter of psychological explanations. The characters are cardboard, but if you want to give your stomach a whirl, this is for you.

Fairy-tale fuzz

By T.J. Binyon

ED MCBAIN:

Rumpelstiltskin
241pp. Hamish Hamilton. £6.95.
0 241 10522 6

Evan Hunter, aka Ed McBain, aka Curt Cannon, aka Hunt Collins, aka Ezra Hanson, aka Richard Marsten, is best-known under the first of these pseudonyms in criminal circles. It is as Ed McBain that he has written over thirty novels about the policemen of the 87th Precinct in a city not unlike New York. It's a series which ranks high in the police procedural genre: well-plotted, wittily written, realistic in its detailed account of police work and its descriptions of the underside of contemporary urban life in America. If the books have a fault, it's that the policemen - hand-some Steve Carella with his beautiful blond and dumb wife, rookie Ben Kling, bold Meyer, sadistic Andy Parker - are made up of far more meretriciously fictional material than the surroundings in which they live and work.

Recently, however, McBain has gone off on a new tack and begun another series in which the central figure - and the narrator - is a Florida lawyer, Matthew Hope. In the first of the series, *Goldlocks*, a client's wife and his two small daughters are murdered with a kitchen knife; Hope helps the police with their investigations and simultaneously his marriage collapses. In *Rumpelstiltskin* he begins an affair with Vicky Miller, a once popular singer who is attempting a comeback. She is found bludgeoned to death

after the first night they spend with one another; her young daughter is kidnapped, later murdered. Initially a suspect, Hope graduates to honorary detective, discovers the vital clue which solves the mystery, and at the end of the novel is well on his way towards renewed domestic felicity with Dale O'Brien, a busy lawyer with ruset (his word) hair and green eyes.

Goldlocks seemed to be making a bid to be a more serious work than McBain's earlier novels, with its stern denial that instant Florida happiness could be achieved through the simple process of divorce and remarriage. *Rumpelstiltskin* sentimentally denies this conclusion, and in many ways seems a disappointing come-down, not only from its predecessor, but also from the 87th Precinct series. The emotional mushiness, earlier strictly confined to the descriptions of Steve Carella's family life, now permeates the entire novel, and, with the change from third to first person narration, there is no longer the possibility of keeping a under control with an objective, distancing, acerbic wit.

The titles of the novels suggest that they are to be taken as contemporary fairy tales - an ill-defined genre, with more disasters per square yard than any other - but nothing else about them bears out this supposition, nor indeed are there any parallels between the plots of the original tales and those of the novels. There are, of course, parallels between the two novels themselves: though why in each the author should choose to kill off a mother and her female child/children is perhaps a question into which a reviewer should not probe. But merely hope for a speedy return to the 87th Precinct.

Stealing the soul

By Richard Combs

DORIS GRUMBACH:

The Missing Person
252pp. Hamish Hamilton. £7.95.
0 241 10600 5

One thing that won't be said, by way of sidelong recommendation for Doris Grumbach's Hollywood novel, is that it is more enjoyable if one recognizes the real tinsel personalities behind her tinsel fictions. There is no prize for guessing that the novel's heroine, one Franny Fuller, is Marilyn Monroe, and only a passing grade for twiggling that characters like Delphine Lacy and Willis Lord are stand-ins for Greta Garbo and John Gilbert. That these the contemporaneous stars can be made to co-exist in the novelist's firmament is a clue to her purpose: this is a generalized portrait of Hollywood, and FF (although her sequence of husbands, from a sports to a literary hero, seems strictly cribbed from MM) is claimed as an identikit of "the women America often glorifies and elevates, and then leaves suspended in their lonely and destructive fame".

As it turns out, the more the real Hollywood shows through, the less satisfying the portrait becomes. The author's assumption (a common one) seems to be that since Hollywood put fantasy on an anonymous, mass-production basis, the results can be freely re-arranged by the inspired do-it-yourselfer. In the era of "faction" and "dramadoc", it might be pedantic to complain about this mixture of fact and fiction, or fiction randomly stuffed with fact. But in re-fantazizing the fantasy factory, Ms Grumbach allows herself the licence of fiction without taking on the responsibility, ie to find revised truth out in the title that ladies who surrender to being shadows on other people's fantasies, also surrender their sense of self. Flatly stated, this is just a literary gloss on the supersti-

tious belief that photography steals the soul. And flatly stated is all it is here.

With so thin a theme, it is not surprising that the re-invented details come out as superficial window-dressing. The effect is vaguely foolish when the "fictions" Lord and Lacy duo sit around discussing actual movies. But the lack of really imaginative recreation is crippling when Franny comes to make a film written by her poet-husband (the Monroe Arthur Miller film *The Mist* is lamely translated as *The Lonely Ones*) or when the Actors' Studio "Method" becomes "The Way Theory of Acting". This kind of fatuous substitution, implying that one title means as much or as little as any other when everything is a false front, looks very shabby compared to, say, Norman Mailer's biography of Monroe, in which the novelistic theme of the missing person is engaged with a more complex sense of the relationship between an actress and her roles.

Along with Ms Grumbach's simplification goes the kind of writing which glibly incorporates film terminology. Thus, Eddie Puritan, the man who launches Franny's career but also values her as a person, is "the agent of her real self, the slate man for all her inner takes", and Franny, we are told in the last paragraph, "lingers in the umbra between celluloid eternity and the accident of mortality... destined, like everyone else, for the final take on the shores of darkness". Nevertheless, there is production in this prose: a certain most of the characters into a chapter each, surrounded by an implied emptiness. In place of the usual crowded Hollywood narrative, this has the melancholy air, appropriately enough, of an underpopulated landscape. It is a style which comes into its own not in Hollywood at all but in the descriptions of Dempsey Buitt, Franny's footballer husband, growing up in Iowa. Here simple values are etched with an almost surreal between Norman Rockwell and Edward Hopper. But as attractive as this occasionally is as a picture, it doesn't add up to a whole vision.

NICHOLAS ABERCROMBIE, STEPHEN HILL, and BRYAN S. TURNER:
The Dominant Ideology Thesis
232pp. Allen and Unwin. £12.50.
0 04 30117 9.

"It is widely agreed", these authors write, "that the notion of 'ideology' has given rise to more analytical and conceptual difficulties than almost any other term in the social sciences." Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, however, are less concerned to present a more adequate conception than to attack what they see as the exaggerated importance ascribed to ideology by many contemporary social theorists, both Marxist and non-Marxist. The vagueness of the term, especially the equation by some writers of ideology with lists of beliefs which are open to almost infinite expansion, is only one part of this book's argument against the view that the survival of both feudalism and capitalism has depended on the indoctrination of the lower classes in a dominant ideology justifying their subordinate position. Ultimately, one must, they feel, face up more directly to the question of the meaning of "ideology" itself, even for the limited purpose of explaining the specious plausibility of the theories they rightly reject. Yet their insistence on confronting these theories with a rich array of historical evidence is a major contribution, as well as being a refreshing change from the arid and portentous juggling of concepts so often passed off as sociological theory.

The historical survey presumably accounts for the presence of three authors in what is quite a slim book. They begin with a summary of several variants of the "dominant ideology thesis" which is their critical target. They choose as representatives of Marxist thought Gramsci, Habermas and Althusser, undoubtedly the most influential Marxist thinkers of our time to have emphasized the independent significance of ideology and rejected the economic strain in Marxism. The authors of the book note the striking convergence between these fashionable versions of Marxism and the academic sociology chiefly associated with Talcott Parsons which insists on a "common culture" of shared values and beliefs as the fundamental cohesive force holding modern societies together. Both approaches, they argue, are at variance with the "classical" sociological tradition of Marx, Durkheim and Weber: "Contemporary sociological interpretations have 'personified' Weber and Durkheim in the same way that Lukács and Korsch 'Hegelianised' Marx, with the result that... the superstructure of values and beliefs is emphasized at the expense of economic structure."

Marx, Weber, and Durkheim have appropriately been called the "Holy Trinity" of contemporary academic sociology. Abercrombie, Hill and Turner remain as completely as the theorists whom they criticize within the confines of the church in seeking to ground their criticisms in a re-reading and reinterpretation of the scriptural texts. They recognize that the Marxist form of the dominant ideology thesis finds its initial variant in the famous passage of *The German Ideology* beginning with "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas". But the later Marx, they argue, placed far greater stress on what he called in *Capital* "the dull compulsion of economic relations". Weber attempted to show that a religious ideology, Calvinism, had made a crucial contribution to the emergence of the spirit of capitalism; yet he contended in the very same essay that later capitalism no longer needed the support of religious motives but had become self-sustaining. "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so," Weber's later views of developed capitalism, as several interpreters have recently shown, were fairly close to those of Marx.

The authors' attempt to find legitimation for their critique in the sociological classics runs aground, however, with Durkheim. In the only part of the book's argument which is utterly unconvincing, they invoke Durkheim's conception of the "organic solidarity" of modern societies, contrasted with the common morality and shared sacred beliefs uniting the simpler societies. They are correct in contending that their awareness of dependence on the occupational performances of others for the satisfaction of material needs is a conservative force restraining people from rebelling under a highly developed division of labour. Marx and Weber indeed gave explicit weight to this, but Durkheim meant a good deal more by "organic solidarity", as the second term clearly implies. He had in mind not a mere, possibly resigned cognitive awareness, but rather an essentially moral consciousness of mutual interdependence despite individual differences, a secularized and humanized version, in effect, of the medieval doctrine of the "great chain of being". "Every society", he insisted, in *On the Division of Labour in Society*, "is a moral society", and he immediately went on to add that "In certain respects, this character is even more pronounced in organized societies because the individual is not sufficient unto himself [and] it is from society that he receives everything necessary to him" (my italics).

I doubt whether Durkheim would be much remembered today were he not pre-eminently the sociologist of collective sentiments and their embodiment in rules and rituals. Unwilling to evict him from the sociological pantheon and hand him over entirely to the anthropologists, the authors minimize his major thesis by writing dismissively of his "hankering after mechanical solidarity" and suggesting that his last book has relevance only to primitive societies - as if Durkheim did not seek out "the elementary forms of the religious life" precisely because he thought they disclosed the essence of a universal phenomenon. The issue is not whether Durkheim was right; only whether he is accurately represented as one who minimized the binding force of common values in modern societies.

These authors are true children of post-natalist late-twentieth-century Europe in their rejection of the efforts of neo-Durkheimian sociologists to identify substitutes for religion in patriotic ceremonies. But Durkheim wrote in an age of rising nationalism which produced two world wars whose historical impact struggles since the rise of industrial capitalism added together. The authors barely mention nationalism, but what about its possible status as a dominant ideology, granting that the contemporary theorists they criticize also neglect it? Does "ideology" include only beliefs about "social systems" or the form of social institutions, and exclude passionate commitments to a concrete society whatever its past and present social structure? These authors treat religion as ideology in discussing feudal Christianity and bourgeois Protestantism, so it is hard to see why nationalism is undeserving of their attention.

The core of the book consists of two chapters testing the dominant ideology thesis against the historical examples of feudalism and early capitalism, and one chapter assessing the sociological evidence on late capitalism (or, more accurately, on late British society and consider separately the outlooks of dominant and subordinate classes. Not surprisingly, the authors conclude that under feudalism there was a gulf between the religious and chivalric values of the nobility and the pre-Reformation paganism of the peasantry. They pick their way with skill across the crowded terrain of recent scholarship on nineteenth-century Britain, concluding that the working class underwent a process of "ideological incorporation" by the bourgeoisie af-

ter the decline of Chartist. There was a dominant ideology in both of these social orders, but it served to unify the dominant classes only. The lower classes endured rather than affirmed their circumstances and preserved an indigenous, though only partly oppositional, culture of their own. Working-class culture converged in some respects with that of the bourgeoisie in Victorian England, but not because of imposition by the latter. The authors pay particular attention to the values of the dominant classes with respect to sexuality, marriage, descent and inheritance, crucial matters for the perpetuation of the system when the mode of production depended as it did on private property in land or capital.

The absence of effective agencies for transmitting ideology - Marx's "means of mental production" - largely accounted for the lack of ideological consensus under feudalism and early capitalism, and the resultant reliance on political repression and economic coercion to keep the lower classes in their place. Contemporary capitalism presents a different picture. The apparatus of ideological transmission has expanded enormously with the development of the mass media and compulsory universal education. The authors remain firmly on the level of high theory, but, in conjunction with the decline of crude repression and the whip of hunger, the expansion of the means of communication lends plausibility to the common left-wing complaint about "brainwashing" by "the media" and pervasive "false consciousness". Significantly, early Marxists imputed the latter to the world-view of the bourgeoisie whereas later-day Marxist ideologues almost invariably apply it to the "masses" as a putative explanation of their failure to respond to radical appeals. Such a belief also serves to encourage academic Marxists in the conviction that writing and lecturing are themselves revolutionary activities of primary importance. There is a radical sociology journal in America which announces on its masthead that its aim is "to liberate sociology from bourgeois hegemony"; contributors can even earn publication credits for university promotions.

Paradoxically, the improved means of ideological dissemination have coincided, the authors argue, with a decline in the coherence of a dominant ideology itself, even one affirmed only by the dominant classes. Marxists, they show, disagree among themselves and are distressingly vague about the core beliefs allegedly underpinning contemporary capitalism. A traditional defence of private property exists alongside meritocratic legitimations of inequality that in no way presuppose either private property or production for a market. The separation of ownership and management is a feature of large corporations, even if it has not led to the far-reaching changes forecast by earlier analysts who correctly diagnosed it as a trend some decades ago. The greater involvement of the state, both directly in capital accumulation and indirectly through social services determining the conditions of "private" economic activity, is no longer resisted in principle. The decline of what Daniel Bell calls "family capitalism" undermines both economic individualism and the domestic morality which were prime articles of bourgeois faith in the last century. More permissive sexual and personal mores no longer threaten the stability of the capitalist mode of production, even if individual or family ownership and control of the means of production cease to prevail in the major sectors of the economy.

But these developments do not portend a heightened class struggle accompanied by large-scale defections from support for capitalism by the dominant classes, for capitalism has never required ideological consensus in order to survive. Marx himself never held that a fully realized oppositional class consciousness on the part of the proletariat was a

sufficient condition for the transition to socialism in the absence of the breakdown of capitalism and increasing material misery suffered by the workers. The most brilliant capsule statement about capitalism I know is Ernest Gellner's remark that if it didn't exist, no one would have bothered to invent it. Nor need its continued existence depend on general belief in its ultimate goodness and justice. The conclusion of this effect of *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* is doubtless even more disheartening to ever-hopeful radicals than the rejection of the claim that the system is sustained by the overpowering "ideological hegemony" of the bourgeoisie. The authors note the obvious anti-radical effect of improved material rewards: workers too clearly have more to lose than their chains, and Marcusean denunciations of inculcated "false" material needs do not gain the fact that, as they laconically remark, "after all, a washing machine is a machine for washing clothes which has real advantages". They also comment on the increased expectation of life, so often forgotten in these discussions. Thus "economism" is not false consciousness and "reformism" has produced real, tangible benefits for the working class. They recognize that there is widespread working-class support for meritocratic standards justifying inequality, but note also the frequency of denials that these standards actually govern the distribution of wealth and income in contemporary Britain. They do not overlook the negative demonstration effect of totalitarianism on the Soviet model in weakening the appeal of total opposition to capitalism. They conclude that "subordination typically accept the existing order on a pragmatic basis that involves little normative involvement and accounts for the incoherence of their value system".

Capitalism, then, is essentially a condition to which people accommodate themselves, rather than the embodiment of a theory or ideology which they affirm. But this brings us back to the question of what we mean by "ideology", a question not sufficiently dealt with by these authors despite their appendix on the concept itself, which turns out to be largely confined to discussing (and rejecting) the traditional Marxist equation of ideology with a false or "mystified" view of reality.

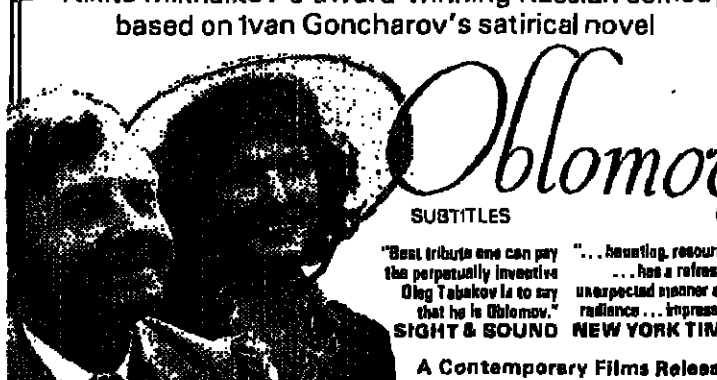
Ideology is conventionally understood as a relatively systematic and explicitly formulated conception of society and history that includes both factual claims about their essential nature and prescriptions for action, especially political action, inferred from the claims. Few people other than some neo-classical economists and publicists for trade associations believe in capitalism as an ideology in this sense; it is usually evaluated by its concrete results. The various theorists of a dominant ideology broaden the notion to include virtually any and all social norms, values and ideals to the point where it becomes identical with the entire realm of the normative or even with culture in the anthropologist's sense.

Even the bourgeois individualism and strict domestic moral codes which the authors see as having united the dominant class under early capitalism did not truly constitute a "capitalist ideology". Tom Bottomore, in his foreword, qualifies the authors' overall thesis by suggesting that nationalism and the "ideology of achievement" have at least had the "negative influence" of inhibiting the development of "the counter-ideology of a subordinate class". I think he is right about nationalism, but the achievement principle does not necessarily presuppose a capitalist economy, although it may have been historically associated with, and even have contributed to, its rise. "Bourgeois individualism", including belief in individual achievement, a work ethic, and "deferred gratification", may even be invoked in support of a non-statist form of socialism against the late capitalism that is held to have undermined it.

Abercrombie, Hill and Turner insist in their appendix that "ideology" must be seen as a category of consciousness in order to make a difference between belief and practice theoretically possible. I think it must be seen in an even more restricted sense as a particular kind of category of consciousness. They are in this passage obeying to Althusser's extension of ideology to embrace "practices" as well as beliefs. Althusser here converges strikingly with Parsons, who tended to regard all regularities in motivated human action as expressions of internalized values acquired through socialization. In both cases, any stable society - that is, one not rent by civil war or revolution - must, virtually by definition, rest on value-consensus or commitment to a dominant ideology. Despite the very different political ambivalences of the French Communist and the American liberal, they exhibit a common sociological reductionism. *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* should encourage further exploration of this underlying "residue", as Pareto might have called it.

Anthropological approaches to the sciences have developed as part of a broader tradition concerned both about the place of the sciences in today's world and the legitimacy of the sciences. In *Sciences and Cultures* (270pp. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 90 277 1234 4) the editors, Everett Mendelsohn and Yehuda Elkana, have aimed to present studies that would be suggestive and stimulate further research. Included in this book are articles by Arthur Kleinman on "The Meaning Context of Illness and Care: Reflections on a central Theme in the Anthropology of Medicine", by Yehuda Elkana on "A Programmatic Attempt at an Anthropology of Knowledge", Wolf Lepenies on "Anthropological Perspectives in the Sociology of Science", Peter W. G. Wright on "On the Boundaries of Science in Seventeenth-Century England", Peter Buck on "Science and Modern Chinese Culture", and Robert S. Anderson on "The Necessity of Field Methods in the Study of Scientific Research".

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Rehabilitating the stumble-bum

By D. C. Watt

ROBERT A. DIVINE

Eisenhower and the Cold War
181pp. Oxford University Press. £7.50.
0 19 502823 6

Robert A. Divine is, perhaps, one of the least "scholar-bound" of the American diplomatic historians, using the term as it is normally used in the United States as meaning historians of American foreign policy. He has written one of the most thoughtful re-evaluations of Franklin Roosevelt. He is the author of an excellent history of the internationalist impulse in the United States in the Second World War. And his most recent book, *Blowing in the Wind: the Nuclear Posture Debate in the United States 1954-1960* (New York, 1978) provided a most thorough examination of the internal and external aspects of the debate on nuclear policy in the United States during six of the eight years of the Eisenhower presidency - a debate which, in its sophisticated admixture of advanced nuclear physics, high politics and deeply held moral convictions, made so much of what passed for political debate over nuclear weapons in Britain at the same time seem jejune and ignorant posturing.

He has now turned his attention to the rehabilitation of President Eisenhower. In the onrush of American political scientists into the New Frontier and the arms of the Kennedy clan, President Eisenhower's reputation has suffered nearly as much as it used to at the hands of the cartoonist Herblock, and the now forgotten humorists of the late 1950s such as Mori Sahl. In the Common Rooms of Columbia it was whispered that he had only been elected as Vice-Chancellor because electors confused him with his respected and respectable academic brother, Dr. Milton Eisenhower. Stories were told of him sitting through sessions of the National Security Council following the arguments with the same painful incomprehension as might be displayed by a pass student in arts listening to a meeting of the *Wiener Kreis*. His infidelities of expression when facing the press were collected and retailed in Washington salons and elsewhere as avidly as were his frequent appearances on the golf course. As a result, the Eisenhower of the war years has lost much of his lustre, and the successful organizer of Montgomery, Bradley and Patton has been reduced by some writers to the level of a strategic stumble-bum. If only for this reason, President Eisenhower deserved a serious re-evaluation; the more so as there has been a tendency among the younger and more sensationalist of modern historians to transfer their previous animus against President Truman as the (alleged) initiator of the Cold War to Eisenhower as its perpetrator and intensifier.

Divine's method is to divide his subject's policy under the general heading of the Cold War into four major subdivisions: his concept of the Presidency; his role in the (quite separate) Cold War in Asia and in the development of the doctrine of massive retaliation; his role in the Middle East, which includes the Suez crisis of 1956 and the Lebanon-Israel crisis of 1958; and lastly, his search for an accommodation with the Soviet Union which was to end so disastrously with the failure of the Paris "summit" in 1960.

It should be said at the start that Divine is no hagiographer seeking, as more illustrious American historians have sought, to rebuild his subject's reputation, in order to derive political advantage for some other cause in the here and now. If his Eisenhower is no stumble-bum, he is no epitome of any code of political morality either. In Divine's view, Eisenhower conceived political ambitions as early as 1943 (when George Patton commented "like wants to be President so badly you can taste it"). He took the Presidency of Columbia to escape the awkward military moves which faced America's Chief of Army Staff in 1946-47, when America's military run-down stood in

sharp contrast to her increasing global involvement. He eagerly accepted the Chief Command in NATO when it was set up, as the best way of keeping his name before the potential electorate. He kept in touch throughout this interim period with his potential backers in the Republican party, and won the nomination and the election not by a public draft but by a political fight of great bitterness, showing himself "an adept, and, at times ruthless politician", destroying Senator Taft as a rival only to rehabilitate him as an ally, manipulating Richard Nixon and throwing his mentor General Marshall ruthlessly to the wolves to appease and block out Senator Joe McCarthy.

In this rise to fame his greatest assets were his very considerable skill in diplomacy, his ability to project openness and sincerity, and his instinctive ability at public relations. His concomitant weakness was a longing to be liked which made him evasive where controversy was concerned and resentful of criticism. As a leader in war he commanded men as strong in personality as Montgomery and Patton, and dealt effectively with Churchill and de Gaulle while retaining throughout the ability to inspire and reassure his own fellow countrymen. He radiated serenity. With this build-up, Professor Divine has no difficulty in showing that the hitherto accepted picture of a passive Eisenhower leaving foreign policy to the Savonarola-like figure of John

Foster Dulles has very little correspondence with reality. Eisenhower's view of the Presidency as an enhanced Supreme Command in which his Cabinet officers were staff officials and the Chiefs of Service Staff his army commanders, involved of necessity the delegation of much of the day-to-day activity of foreign relations to his Secretary of State. But in virtually every major issue he overruled or overrode his Secretary of State, toning down his rhetoric and restraining his activism. Dulles was of most use to him not so much as a negotiator with foreigners as a lightning-rod to divert the hostility of the real cold warriors of the Congressional Republican Right, and as a target for his Democratic critics. He kept Dulles insecure, confronted all-ways with the fact that other foreign policy advisers such as Nelson Rockefeller or Harold Stassen had the entrée to his personal staff.

But when Divine turns to the various episodes which he has chosen as the basis of his rehabilitation of Eisenhower, one is uncomfortably reminded of the difference between the point at which he attempted his reassessment of Franklin Roosevelt and the present state of *Eisenhower studies*. When he tackled Roosevelt there was a massive body of literature of all kinds drawing on the resources not only of the Roosevelt Library's massive collection of personal papers but also on the archives of most of the depart-

ments of the US government. There is a similar, perhaps a greater body of evidence, proportionately speaking, bearing on the Eisenhower presidency. Detailed research on the period is only just beginning; many of the archives of government are still closed. They can be pried open by use of the American Freedom of Information Act; but it is neither an easy nor a fast process. Where British, French and German sources are concerned, it is only now that a more extensive memoir literature is coming into being to support the published recollections of the major statesmen. Nor has Divine used effectively all that is available.

Two examples will have to suffice. Divine rightly makes President Eisenhower rather than John Foster Dulles the architect of the British and French disaster at Suez. Dulles, as he points out, was incapacitated by the cancer (which later killed him) at the vital moment of the Anglo-French expedition against Suez. At the Anglo-French meeting with Dulles at the end of July, 1956, both governments derived the impression from him that America would not be altogether unhappy or surprised if in the end they felt obliged to overthrow the Egyptian government by force. It was the President who drove Dulles to such turns and twists and evasive manoeuvres as to make Eden and the French dismiss him as totally unreliable. What Divine does not add is that it was from Eisenhower himself

that Macmillan, visiting America in September, derived the assurance that America would keep the Soviet Union off Britain's back, and that by implication (otherwise why would this reassurance be sought or given?) that the President would not stand in the way of Nasser's downfall. Eisenhower's pursuit of the British government's, his allegations of Dulles's *locum*, Herbert Hoover Junior, in the open humiliation of Selwyn Lloyd in the United Nations, seem peculiarly unforgivable. And Divine's attempts to make the Eisenhower doctrine into anything more than a short course in how not to make policy in the Middle East is not a success.

Where Divine is most at fault, however, is in his failure to reconcile the Eisenhower who affected amused tolerance for Churchill's last attempts to secure a "summit" conference in 1953-54, with the Eisenhower whom he sees as working incessantly for a summit conference to end the Cold War with Russia, who believed that if only he could put his convictions directly to the Soviet leadership they would be converted to his (the right) way of thinking. There are nuances and subtleties here of Eisenhower's views of and relations with Britain and British governments, a subject to which Divine doesn't direct his individual attention. All the same this is a fascinating and stimulating little book.

Ingela Floto, a Danish scholar, has focused her intensive study.

This book was first published in English by the Aarhus University Press in 1973. It did not then receive the attention it merited and its republication as one of the Supplementary Volumes to *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* is to be welcomed, though it is a pity that the opportunity has not been taken to integrate the material in the text, the notes and the appendixes in a clearer and less repetitious way, and to improve the wholly inadequate index. It may be surmised, however, that its reappearance under these auspices owes something to the fact that it constitutes a pretty devastating salvo in a long-running historiographical battle between the partisans of Wilson and the admirers of House. The former, notably Ray Stannard Baker, the President's press secretary in Paris and official biographer, have attributed the break between the two men to Wilson's dissatisfaction on his return from America with the way House had performed as his deputy. Charles Seymour, editor of House's *Intimate Papers*, took issue with this interpretation, seeing the decline of the friendship as a less dramatic, more gradual process which largely occurred after Wilson's stroke in September 1919. Others have emphasized the hostility of the second Mrs Wilson to House, and the President's increasing resentment of advice as he obsessively pursued his fight for the League of Nations.

On the basis of the most meticulous examination of the available evidence, Professor Floto concludes that Baker was right in all essentials. Wilson withdrew his trust from the Colonel immediately upon his return to France in mid-March 1919, after learning (not only from House) of the unauthorized concessions that had been made during his absence, particularly over a preliminary peace treaty that made no mention of the League of Nations and over French demands for an independent Rhenish republic. Professor Floto is much concerned with the reasons for House's "disloyalty" and, like other writers on Wilson and House, she is attracted by psychological explanations - in this case, House's desire to be at the centre of events and his susceptibility to flattery, especially from Clemenceau. She points out that House's unauthorized actions (which included the Bullitt Mission to the Soviet government) reflected

no consistent ideological position, and her portrait of his personality is a persuasive one. At the same time, she perhaps underestimates both the hardening of Wilson's opposition to the idea of a preliminary peace treaty after his trip to America, and the growing criticism in Paris of the slowness of the peace-making process, which any loyal deputy would have wanted to deflect from the President.

Above all, however, nothing in Professor Floto's account suggests that House's actions had any significant influence on the final terms of the Treaty. On the contrary, by seeing the break as so decisive and as coming so early, she absolves House from any responsibility for such concessions as those over reparations and over Shantung for which he has sometimes been blamed. In deed, it is clear that American policy throughout was made by Wilson, and it is in analysing the reasons for his decisions during the critical phase of the Conference in March and April, 1919, that Professor Floto makes her most interesting and valuable contribution. The Wilson who emerges from these pages is very different from the inept idealist caricatured by Keynes and Nicolson. Instead, we see an able and ambitious politician, highly conscious of the extent to which his political fortunes were bound up both with establishing a League of Nations into which he could lead the United States, and with maintaining his reputation as a spokesman for liberalism. While Professor Floto agrees with Arno J. Mayer and N. Gordon Levin, Jr. that Wilson was a political realist, she differs from them in seeing him as much less concerned with the Bolshevik threat in Europe than with the Republican threat in America. Professor Floto convincingly links several of Wilson's actions, such as his abandonment of his implied threat to leave the Conference and his public manifesto over Italy's claim to Fiume, to the reports on American opinion he was receiving from his political secretary in Washington, Joseph Tumulty. She emphasizes the way Wilson's opponents at home and abroad reinforced each other and how, far from occupying the omnipotent position so extravagantly described by Keynes and Nicolson, he really had little room for manoeuvre. The deliberations in the Council of Four may have been less crucial than they seemed.

Preempting the peacemaker

By J. A. Thompson

INGA FLOTO

Colonel House in Paris: A Study of American Policy at the Paris Peace Conference 1919
374pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press. £11.60.
0 691 04662 X

Rarely does the role of individuals in shaping history seem more impressive than at peace conferences. The decisions made by a few men sitting round a table determine the jurisdictions, and often the conditions, under which whole populations will live their lives, perhaps for generations. Never was this more dramatically evident than in Paris in 1919 when the map of Europe was redrawn by a Council of Ten that was later reduced to a Council of Four. To Keynes, these four individuals became "in the first months of 1919 the microcosm of mankind", and the pen-portraits that he and that other disillusioned mandarin Harold Nicolson sketched of the big three, Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Wilson - "an old man of the world, a *femme fatale*, and a nonconformist

clergyman" - did much to persuade the inter-war generation that the chief reason why the Treaty of Versailles departed so far from Wilson's Fourteen Points was simply that the slow-minded, self-righteous American President was "bamboozled" by the wily Europeans.

One of Wilson's principal errors in the eyes of such critics had been to conduct negotiations in person - to allow himself, in Keynes's words, "to be closeted, unsupported, unadvised, and alone, with men much sharper than himself" - and to neglect his fellow-Commissioners. Of these, the most prominent was undoubtedly the close lieutenant and "dearest friend", "Colonel" Edward M. Nicholson, of "the best diplomatic brain that America has yet produced". House had conducted several diplomatic missions for the President both before and after American entry into the war and had, indeed, negotiated the pre-Armistice agreement with the Allies in October-November, 1918. But during the course of the peace conference itself, his relationship with Wilson - described by Sir Horace Plunkett as "the strangest and most fruitful personal alliance in human history" - perceptibly cooled. It is upon the reasons for this "break" that Profes-

Autumn Notes

Silence . . . It is autumn in the borough . . .
Rain . . . and only the rain says anything -
A leaden peace, a wind, and on the wind
Go liberated leaves hurrying by.

Open up, my adored one, let me in,
I've come to you with branches and with dried
Leaves; in the town, a sad girl has died -
They took her out and buried her, in the rain . . .

Let me in, it is autumn in the borough -
The whole earth has the aspect of a tomb . . .
Rain . . . and borne by the wind, over the town
Go liberated leaves hurrying by.

1907

George Bacovia

Translated by Peter Jay

Note: George Bacovia, widely regarded as one of the most important Romanian poets of this century, was born on September 17 1881. He died in 1957.

POETRY

Primary experiences

By Tim Dooley

ANDREW HARVEY

A Full Circle
50pp. Andre Deutsch. £3.95.
0 233 97289 7

LEONARD CLARK

The Way It Was
77pp. Enitharmon Press. £4.50.
(paperback, £3).
0 905289 17 X

ROBIN SKELTON

The Collected Shorter Poems 1947-1977
335pp. Victoria, British Columbia: Sono Nix Press.
0 91962 79 0

Even before the publication of this first collection of poems, *Masks & Faces*, in 1978, Andrew Harvey was being widely and justly praised as a poet of unusual gifts. That eclectic and highly civilized collection revealed a mystery of very varied forms and considerable emotional and intellectual range. In the years between that and *A Full Circle*, he has collaborated with the late Anne Pennington on three volumes of translation from Macedonian and Serbo-Croatian folk literature. His latest collection, which includes "re-creations" of poems from other languages, is deeply influenced by that work.

The result is an almost complete paring down of the exuberance that marked *Masks & Faces*. The new volume consists of an uninterrupted cycle of short poems, mostly untitled, recording the primary experiences (of loneliness and desire, of suffering and bereavement) common to both civilized and primitive communities. Harvey's stated intention is to capture some of the "simplicity, grace and intensity" that he has admired in folk literature. The menus he chooses to employ involve a strictly limited vocabulary, minimal figurative language and a generally arbitrary formal organization. The following complete poem is an extreme, but not untypical example:

See
Earth
these heaps
of pale bones in the wind
heaps
higher than mountains
Earth
harden me

This kind of writing strikes me as simplistic rather than simple, denatured rather than natural. Primitive literature, like primitive language, is usually intensely complex in its formal organization and derives its simplicity and clarity from recourse to a shared experience of the natural world and of myth. An enterprise such as Harvey's is bound to be problematic since we now lack any common ground of this sort. By yoking together poems which have their sources in such diverse cultures as the Aztec and the Eskimo, the Andalusian and the Christianized Greek, Harvey denies his poems any local habitation. By relying largely on the devices of a print culture for a sense of form, he distances the poems from rhythms of speech or song and effectively replaces the naming of experience with its representation, forcing us to read between words rather than letting us hear them. What we are being asked to settle for is, by and large, an airy nothingness: inhabited by ghosts of poems, disembodied voices.

Occasionally, however, the strengths of his originals and Harvey's own undeniable talent combine to surpass the limitations of the exercise and produce writing of eloquence and force. This is particularly true of the poems which draw on the sensibility of the medieval Greek poems on death achieve some of the same lyrical intensity as his

"Songs of Odysseus Iliad" in *Masks & Faces*, and his version of a poem by St John of the Cross at least bears comparison with the one made of poems of the same era in Geoffrey Hill's "The Pentecost Castle".

Young shepherd in a dark country
Love had him wounded and lonely

Young shepherd in a dark country
where he was beaten
Love had him wounded and lonely.

"She has left me to die alone,
and will not remember my name"

He mounted a high tree
Love spread his arms wide

Love held him there until he died,
The rootlessness and diversity
which make an entirely sympathetic
reading of *A Full Circle* difficult are
absent from Leonard Clark's *The Way It Was*, Clark's dominant sub-
ject is the "blue remembered hills",
of an idealized rural England. "The
shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
the gullies, the carved choirs"
that Larkin pictured going under the
architect's hammer are something
still accessible to Clark. He creates a
world in which the experience of the
seasons is still felt as primary. "With
April but a name for daffodils"
("Easter"); where the church with its
bell-towers and well-tended graves is
the pivot of a community, not merely
a decorative adjunct. The myster-
ies of birth and death seem more
approachable within such a pattern
and Clark is able to write of them
with clarity and conviction.

A brief glance at the first-line index to Robin Skelton's *Collected Shorter Poems* produces the interesting statistical information that more than a tenth of the poems commence with the pronoun "I". It is not surprising, therefore, that both the strengths and weaknesses of Skelton's writing appear to derive from a characteristic self-concern. Some of the most successful of these poems were completed or first published in the early 1960s, the period just following the publication of Lowell's *Life Studies* and Snodgrass's *Heart's Needle*. While Skelton's writing can

There can, however, be something too self-centred about Clark's certainties. The recurrent identifications between re-entrance and the pattern of the seasons, the too ready assurance that the names on obscure graves "live on", can come to sound a little pat. It is perhaps for this reason that a poem like "Under-house", which allows into Clark's idyll some sense of the forces that threaten it, remained for me the most impressive in the collection:

New tenants came with silos,
doubled the cows in the valley
ten score of sheep balanced on the
left the under-house empty.
Mice scuttled now through cobwebs
where once the little empty purred
the air half-dropped with sweet
the cancer rusted, the press, drunken
and dry.

Memories also allow him to treat wider, more public themes with conviction. This is seen in "Big Field", where a schoolboy's sports field and changing room humiliations are set against France's victory in Spain and the fall of France, or "Viet Nam" which draws on Skelton's memories of the Blitz to enhance its rhetorical effects. "Memory should instruct us", Skelton comments in "At Walden Pond", but also demonstrates how it can disturb the equilibrium of the present with its unasked-for visions of guilt or terror.

Skelton's finest poems explore the eerie coexistence in the imagination of different periods of time. The

remind one of the tender self-examination of those two books, he was not as successful as the two Americans in making memorable poetry out of the current conflicts of his personal life.

His gifts are more positively demonstrated instead in those poems which make use of involuntary memory, where his talent for the particular evocation of visual and tactile sensations is clear, as may be seen in the following description of a garden shed in "As I Remember It":

A fingernail pressed home into the
blue-wet with autumn could scarp
They sang through gutters,
that squashed like pith of cider in the
wood-shavings, pitch-pine mostly, lay
the top layer fresh and crispy, faintly
the ones below brown, swollen

Imagination
evokes details
They sang through gutters,
catching the wet in their
mouths, licking
their bare arms.
The shirt flies,
the same shoulders,
the same neck:
I stare out from
his photograph

The weakness that derives from Skelton's self-absorption emerges most obviously in his many poems on sexual love. These lack any of the subtlety of the pieces which draw on memory. Skelton's account of the adventures of what one poem refers to as his "poor, dumb/ swollen-headed thing" is explicit and tediously detailed. The timesequence member is so busy that one begins to wonder where its owner found the time to produce the fifteen hooks of poetry and forty-one other titles the blur credits him with completing since moving to Canada in 1963.

Living in the world

By William Scammell

LOUIS SIMPSON

A Company of Poets
385pp. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. \$5.95.
0 472 06326 X

PHILIP LEVINE

Don't Ask
177pp. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
0 472 06327 8

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

The Old Poetries and the New
326pp. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. \$6.95.
0 472 06319 7

"When people worry about the state of poetry in Britain, especially in comparison with the States, I think that what they are worried about is literary movement and excitement. Good poets are nice to have, but movements are more fun, and these days the Americans seem to be having all the fun." Thus Louis Simpson in 1971, in a wise and witty essay called "Advice to the English". A *Company of Poets* brings together a wide variety of Simpson's autobiographical pieces and talks, reviews of contemporary poetry, and interviews. It contains a great many good things, especially in the reviews section. Here he is on Allen Ginsberg, for example: "He was perfectly capable of writing advertising copy and paying his analyst, but the voice of William Blake kept breaking in." Of the same writer's *Journal*, he observes: "It dreams do not make good reading - no wonder psychoanalysts are paid large fees for listening to them!" But he is too good a critic to settle for the settling of scores. Admitting that he was one of the people who did not pay sufficient attention to Ginsberg's poems when they first came out he says "I am happy to have this opportunity to say I was wrong - not merely wrong, obtuse. I still don't care for 'Howl' - Lubin Carr and Neal Cassidy were not my idea of 'the best minds in America' but other poems in the volume are superb, and 'Kaddish' is a masterpiece. Anything the author has written since deserves to be read."

That sort of generosity permeates the book, together with an astringent wit. On some aspects of Pound: "This is the typewriter trying to do the work of the imagination." On Shostakovitch: "Without an involvement in technique, the practice of any art must degenerate into a desperate exertion of mere personality." On Robert Duncan: "Duncan reminds me of the French Revolution: he is both the best of times and the worst of times. I know that it is useless to wish that a poet of this kind would try to be clearer, for his poems are the result of his confusions. Nevertheless, it is a fact that William Blake, by persisting in his follies, did not become wise; he merely became tedious." On Gary Snyder: "This may be the peace of the Orient, but I doubt it. [I think it is just monotony.]"

The Interview With a Famous Writer is a dubious genre - quiddity, someone must hope, emerging from the *quid pro quo* of prompter and vade mouchee: but Simpson triumphantly withstands his various grillings. Of his recent work, which reaches, in very American fashion, after a new honesty and simplicity, he says:

Writers have all sorts of ideas, but what counts is the created work. I believe that my attachment to the surface of things will create in the reader a greater affection for life. In American writing we have had a number of weird creations: a woman who wears a scarlet letter, a white whale, a hero who cannot make love, and so on. But it seems to me that we are short of people who love their lives. Do you know the saying by Goethe? "Prophecy to the right, prophets to the left." The child of the world in the middle. Well, I'm a child of the world. I want to write poetry for people who live in the world.

It is a heartwarming book, confirming one's intuition that the man - it is not always so - is as fine as the poems.

Philip Levine's *Don't Ask* consists entirely of interviews with the poet, eight of them in all, one conducted by Studs Terkel. To read more than one of them at a time is to risk growing irritated and bored, such is the nature of the form. It is a danger Philip Levine is well aware of: "Of what possible use or interest is this book?", he asks in his Preface.

"... With Keats, I believe that the poet is the least poetical of beings. . . . Frankly, I would prefer you read my poetry. I think it is a far clearer record of what I believed on those days during which I was most myself." Amen to that. Taken slowly and intermittently, however, this book sheds light on a good and interesting man.

Like Tony Harrison in Britain (and, to some extent, Douglas Dunn), Levine sets out from overtly socialist and working-class premises. Interviewer: *They are the non-celebrated, and in a sense you are celebrating the anonymous.*

Levine: That's right. That's my dearest hope - that I give them names. . . . *The Names of the Last*, when I titled my book that, I'm trying to give them their names back . . .

And: . . . just the writing of a poem is a political act. I don't think there is anything more clear than the fact that our politicians are murdering the language." At this point interviewer and subject go into a duet of condemnation:

So if you write about a beautiful lake . . .
Yes . . .
... by the very nature of its being polluted . . .
... yes . . .
... by industrial waste or military waste . . .
That's right . . .
... it's political . . .
That's right.

Throughout the book Levine names names ("Bly is a poet who has become incredibly boring. I don't think he was very talented to begin with, but he was able to describe snow covered with bird shit very well. But then he became a seer, as did Gary Snyder. They became very wise men . . . and like all wise men they are extraordinarily boring"), armours himself in demotic ("Hayden Carruth digs my poetry") and ironic cadences ("Can I get back to the woman's thing?" "I'd guess nothing could stop you"), quotes Keats, who is evidently his hero, and talks horse sense, as a poet should ("Do you know Alun Lewis?" "No." "Go stand in the corner. Edward Thomas? Thomas Nash?" "No." "I'll break your pencils. . .").

Richard Kostelanetz, whose effusions are about as bad as a book on

modern poetry could be, belongs to the flabby underbelly of cultural journalism, or the Higher Chat. In his preface he touts for commissions: "May I ask publishers and foundations to make that four more books appear to be behind these essays. . . . In the essays themselves I usually play host to irrelevance, and the resulting exchanges are stupefying."

Six feet tall, slender in build, Ashbery has smartly barbered, graying brown hair, soft blue eyes, an incipiently ruddy complexion, and a luxurious, dark grey, half-moon mustache around the top of his mouth. His handsome face is cupped by a long, beakish nose. Except for his new glasses, he has looked roughly the same over the dozen years I have known him. His talk reveals a flat, nasal, western New York accent, and his easy, infectious laughter, wide spaces between his front teeth. One afternoon this spring, when we met at Brooklyn College, he wore a dark blue tennis shirt, light blue jeans, black high-top shoes and a denim jacket.

Oh, and "the real key to Ashbery's genius lies, in my opinion, in the 'sound' of his poetry. . . . Jonathan Coit told me. . . . 'There is a breathing quality.'"

All this and more from someone who has, "thankfully", been published and anthologized around the world. "Some readers might like these essays better than my poetry, or vice versa. . . . One does Literature's work in different ways. . . ."

The useful series from which these three books come, *Poets on Poetry*, would be more useful still with the addition of bibliographies and indexes.

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Nr. Atherstone, Warwick.

way of symbolizing the choice that mankind has to make between them. The very choice of metre is a kind of device: Skelton, for example, shows his characters' loss of measure partly by their use of bastardized or "dog-grel" forms of Measure's four-stress rhyme-royal stanza.

The verse of these plays can cause problems, people being more used to the blank verse line. In the Revels volume Lois Potter has some useful things to say about how to read the four-stress line that derives from Old English, but she is unhappy with what she calls "lurgid fourteeners". Lois Potter and Clynne Wickham both observe that while Nathaniel Woodes is able to depict "the nature and quality of the experience" of despair in *The Confession of Conscience*, his verse cannot rise to the heights of Marlowe's in *Faustus*. Lois Potter quotes, with some disapproval, Woodes's "obviously serious attempt to pull out all the stops for his hero's great outburst":

Oh painful pain of deep disdain, oh
gripping grief of Hell;
Oh horror huge, oh soul suppressed, and
sain with desperation;
Oh fear of sin, the sun whereof no num
can number well;
Oh death, oh furious flames of Hell, my
just recompensation.
just wretched wight, oh creature cursed,
oh child of condemnation;
Oh angry God and merciless, most
fearful to behold
Oh Christ, thou art no lamb to me, but
lion fierce and bold.

But this is splendid stuff, read it aloud and the rhetorical devices have their proper function. The repetition and alliteration are not mere exaggeration but dramatically necessary:

Wall-to-wall angst

By Michael Billington

IAN WATSON:

Conversations with Ayckbourn
189pp. Macdonald. £8.95.
0 354 04649 7

Alan Ayckbourn writes enormously funny, popular comedies about middle-class people for (by and large) middle-class audiences. For that reason he has had very little critical attention between hard covers. Such is the snobbery of English life that anyone who appeals to large numbers of people is automatically assumed to be second-rate (you only have to mention the name of Peter Shaffer in intellectual circles to see the knives being flashed). Yet Ayckbourn is serious as well as popular. His seventeen best-known full-length plays add up to a withering portrait of the horror of modern marriage, of the battleground of family life, of the sexual exploitativeness of middle-management, of the hollowness of familiar social rituals. His chosen form is farce and comedy; but behind the laughter there is a good deal of pain and anger.

Something (but not a lot) of this emerges in Ian Watson's book, which consists of sympathetic, gently prodding chats with Ayckbourn. In many ways the least illuminating of the seven sections is "Plays and Themes", where Ayckbourn does some Boycott-like stonewalling when confronted with the darker aspects of his plays. If Pinter wrote about the sexual under the cocktail-cabinet, Ayckbourn is equally preoccupied with the rodent under the Dunlopillo, but he is reluctant (like most writers) to discuss extrapolated themes. He shoots down the kite which I once flew that he is a leftist subversive in boulevardier's clothing. Only on marriage, with its false expectations, its hurtful quarrels, its frequent subordination of one partner to another ("I think a big piece of it dies in marriage"), does he start to expand and say a little more, perhaps, than he intends.

But there are so many points where he would have liked to see Watson—who, once stage-managed for Ayckbourn, turn more inquisitive. Why is Ayckbourn so fascinated, almost like a Scarborough fish, with the havoc wrought by the well-meaning? Why are mothers in his plays so often unseen destroyers? Is the quiet despair Ayckbourn de-

we are made to realize that the "horror" is "huge", the "flames" "furious", that Philologus is indeed a "creature cursed". What lets it down to my mind is not the language but the fact that finally Philologus is converted and saved. Perhaps we feel retrospectively that his despair is lacking in conviction, unlike that of Faustus.

And this brings us back to the question of tragedy-comedy. In his final chapter, "English Tragedy from its Origins to 1576" (the last part of his book is concerned with the genres of Comedy and Tragedy), Wickham points out that the possibilities of repentance and redemption in Tudor plays prevent them from doing more than "tremble on the brink of tragedy" and make them "shy away from the tragic potential". Even Wagner's *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, which ends with the hero Worldly Man being carried off by Satan, is called a "Comedy" and has to have a counterpart to the hero. Heavenly Man, who is saved, he could hardly not be, with a name like that. And Cambrises is "a lamentable tragedy mixed full of 'pleasant mirth'". Wickham fittingly concludes:

If, twenty years later, Shakespeare could still mock such titles in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe; very tragical mirth" it must be remembered that he himself never elected to eliminate either mirth or "persons of low degree" from his own tragedies.

If Sidney was right to call Tudor drama "mongrel tragicomedy", then Shakespeare's plays too must be put in the doghouse.

piets in his view an unalterable part of the human condition, or does he believe it might be ameliorated by social change? How is it that this apparently contented, secure and successful man has such sharp antennae for vulnerability and failure? Is the darkness of the so-called "winter" plays like *Joking Apart* and *Just Between Ourselves* the result of the December composition, of the onset of middle-age or of a growing pessimism about human relations? Ayckbourn has obviously changed as a dramatist over the years; but Mr Watson is a little too good-mannered to press his subject very far.

Where the book is instructive is in its biographical details (Ayckbourn's mother was a prolific short-story writer who gave her son his own tiny typewriter) and in its account of the influences on the young dramatist. We learn a lot about his early years as actor and stage-manager with that prophet of Theatre in the Round, Stephen Joseph, in Scarborough, and of the way he acquired a love of lighting, sound and the box-of-tricks aspects of theatre: in a revealing phrase Ayckbourn says you have to enjoy imagining the three floors of *Joking Apart* "in much the same way you might enjoy an executive toy". He also emerges as an excellent raconteur: there are stories about Donald Wolfit supplementing his gin with Holy Water while playing in a Jesuit theatre and of Ayckbourn's own skilful evasion of National Service by offering to help a literary-minded Medical Officer get a book published.

Ayckbourn emerges from the conversations as amiable, anecdotal, thin-skinned about criticism, hostile to didacticism, technically exploratory in love with the art and craft of theatre: if asked to write a farce for five non-English-speaking unicyclists he is in a broom-cupboard you feel he could do it. We also learn a lot about his method of working. That, for instance, it often needs not one but eight ideas to get a play off the ground; that the lack of doors in theatre-in-the-round means that he has to conjure up some ingenious farcical equivalent; that the biggest laughs often come from avoiding a slight-gag rather than plunging headlong in. But though the book valuably tells us where Ayckbourn came from and how he works, it leaves much of his bleak observation untouched. Ayckbourn is the undisputed master of G-plan angst; and its source still remains something of a mystery.

Life in a comic strip

By Richard Kwietniowski

ALFRED GUZZETTI:
Two or Three Things I Know about Her
366pp. Harvard University Press.
£16.50.
0 674 91500 3

Within the space of a year, Jean-Luc Godard appears to have made a successful return to art cinema with *Jeune Femme* (*La Vie*) and acquired new popular and critical recognition as a major director. His years in the cold as a controversial and extremist figure are forgotten. All this was conveyed in Britain by the considerable interest in his latest film, by the National Film Theatre retrospective, and by Colin MacCabe's book on his work, all of which appeared at the end of last year.

Alfred Guzzetti's book, a shot-by-shot transcription of the 1966 film with an interpretative running commentary, reflects the growing academic interest in his work. Written out of inter-departmental sessions held weekly over an entire academic year at Harvard, it is an attempt to organize a reading out of its issues and concerns through detailed reference to its transcript.

Transcribing any film is difficult enough, but with Godard, problems are accentuated by the way sound and image contradict and collide as much as they combine (substituting *Numéro Deux* entailed dealing with as many as four simultaneous speech sources). Guzzetti provides the original French dialogue, at least one frame enlargement per shot, and careful attention to how sound is placed (score lines for significant

music, and different type-faces to distinguish off-screen, on-screen and voice-over speech).

The detail of this is impressive, and it goes much further than the conventional way of publishing a screenplay—dialogue plus occasional action-descriptions (often taken from shooting scripts which undergo considerable changes in the filming process). But it is still very difficult to follow how the film places us in relation to what is significant in sound and image. We have to rely on Guzzetti's working out in the commentary, which provides little or no attention to how the spectator is "centred" or "de-centred" in the process of watching the film, a choice crucial to Godard's cinema.

This study is a sort of over-reading of what Guzzetti calls "the most complex and profound work of the most interesting and inventive filmmaker of our time". The film is very open to such an approach. It deals with a Paris working-class family, which adapts to the super-consumption of the economic boom in Gaul (France) by the wife's turning to part-time prostitution. Godard's picture of capitalist and sexual oppression is placed within the changing city-scapes and a plethora of advertising images stressing women's appearance and routine. The intermingling of language and image is crucial: "to live in society today is to live in a giant comic strip".

Although Guzzetti's cross-references and contextualizing are thorough and often absorbing (including extracts from the newspaper articles which stimulated Godard into making the film, and the discovery that the entire lines of one scene are from a Jules Feiffer cartoon), there is a worrying absence in the dense and wandering prose of a distinction between what is textual and what is not. Each sequence (he divides the film into eighteen parts) is

treated like a cryptogram hatched by Godard, with a seemingly limitless array of connotations.

The problem stems from his theory of Godard as the controlling intelligence who asks himself questions through the "I" of the film, the "voice" of the spoken commentary and through character surrogates and objects with personal relevance. Guzzetti is in danger of treating the film too much as an artist's personal meditation. Some "expansions" in justifiable (shots of "cranes read as" pun on the French word "gare", meaning both crane and "gay", prostitute) while others are clearly not (a San Francisco travelogue "serves Godard as an allusion to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and its preoccupation with looking and making images, particularly those of women).

This permits him to disown any inconsistencies in Godard's text ("The image/sound combination he is not, I think, entirely under Godard's control"), and to make an extraordinary judgment of the film's second half as "thin, flat, and boring" because Godard claims "artist's exemption" from the film's making, which Guzzetti understands as the negation of a "politics".

What this study negates as a theory is Godard's emphasis on tradition, making, as MacCabe argues, images and sounds suggest rather than coherently argue. With this film, he set in motion a method of uncertainty in making films (as opposed to making political films); a method, that is, which engages the spectator in the uncertainty of his or her own position, explicitly "cinema", but having to think about its production and consumption. As an attempt to put some of the sense of this film in a wider context Guzzetti's approach is good, but more than a (self-proclaimed) analysis of the film, it is more a drift across

FICTION

Love sickness

By Kate Flint

KATE LAZLO:
Forever After
278pp. The Bodley Head. £6.50.
0 370 30904 9

The central characters of Kate Lazlo's moving novel are well aware of the potential corniness of their situation. Witty, attractive Sara—as the dust-jacket bills her—falls passionately, irrevocably in love with Jason, her hospital doctor, who boasts the requisite heart-melting blend: professional success and warm brown eyes. This hospital romance is decidedly up-market; both lovers are in their forties, with stable if unsatisfying marriages, children, and a secure amount of real estate. Moreover, Sara is herself publicly successful, a writer, keeping her own record of her spreading disease, and initially selecting Jason as the subject of an article.

She poses him questions, not in an emotion-generating tête-à-tête, but in her neatly legible script: what would be his greatest professional triumphs and worst traumas? are men or women better patients? has he ever felt that a case warranted suicide or ever helped a patient who asked to die?

These last two questions are ones recurrently posed by the novel, for the theme of moral responsibility, in both medical and personal spheres, is as important as that of Sara and Jason's developing affair. Just as Sara perceives her doctor as a literary subject, so her body, for him, is much more than a site of sexual speculation and gratification. It is a love object independent of the passions, through which cancer spreads like a Mexican jumping bean from breast to bone, liver and lung, as he once learnt as a medical school litany. Sara struggles with increasingly severe stabs of pain, and

with maintaining a public wryness rather than revealing her private angst and panic, not to mention with successive feelings of absurdity and guilt as her relationship with Jason develops. He, for his part, feels understandable caution at getting involved with a particular patient and simultaneously shows perpetual stress at being to some extent involved with them all, sympathizing with the grief and bitterness of a bereaved husband, and feeling robbed and frustrated himself when the teenage Laura fails to respond to any treatment. The fact of Sara's own unfavourable prognosis comes to deepen both his personal attachment to her and his professional fight against the disease. While cancer patients carry around clippings of miracle cures culled from magazines, so Jason is prepared, in the case of Sara, to look towards the fringes of the accepted medical world, investigating the reputed properties of an African tree-bark derivative.

Since this tree-bark treatment is being tested on a tropical island, beset with the regulation bogmenville and parrots flitting among the nutmeg trees, Kate makes full use of the idyllic surroundings to heighten the emotion of this middle-aged *Love Story*. Certainly some of her dialogue is of the stuff of which waiting-room fictions are made. But what saves the novel from falling totally into sentimentality is the technical specificity and accuracy of its medical details. It is not a story for hypochondriacs. Nor does it pretend to be reassuring about the lengthy process of bone scanning under the great searching metal eye, or try to hide the side-effects of chemotherapy, radiation, hormone suppressants and a variety of named drugs. This romantic novel's title may echo a hundred popular fictions, but there is a deadly irony to the meaning of *Forever After*.

Homage to Andalusia

By Peter Lewis

JOHN CANNON:
Stranger to Sereno
157pp. Bodley Head. £6.50.
0 370 30431 4

The back-jacket of John Cannon's first novel, *Stranger to Sereno*, is most unusual in being a drawing of the author rather than a photograph. Taken in conjunction with the opening section of the book, it creates intriguing possibilities of some kind of reflexive or even Chinese-box narrative in which Cannon will function as both author and participant. The first-person narrator of the prologue, a professional writer who does voluntary work for the Salvation Army and is planning a visit to Spain where he is going to write a stage version of a classic novel, could easily be identified with Cannon himself, who recently spent five years in Andalusia and who dedicates the book "To all my friends in Spain".

The narrator describes his meetings with an elderly man dying of cancer, Richard Whitehouse, once an artist specializing in portraits and himself the son of a painter. Whitehouse, after revealing his life story, urges the narrator to follow in his footsteps by visiting the village of Sereno del Rio in Andalusia, where the most memorable events of his life took place in 1936.

Yet if the prologue sets up a number of possible fictional gambits, the rest of the novel (apart from a three-page epilogue) fails to pursue any of them except for the most straightforward. The first-person narrator of the third-person omniscient narrative describing Whitehouse's arrival in Sereno no long before the Spanish Civil War and his subsequent but unintentional involvement in the events of that bloody summer. *Stranger to Sereno* is, therefore, a novel about the Civil War, but one in which Cannon narrows his focus to one village during the early stages of the rebellion.

commentary

Aristotle and the art of football

By Andrew Hislop

Escape to Victory
Odeon Cinema, Leicester Square

"None of us feel or look like world-class players"—the cackney tones come a little less naturally now, but Michael Caine's body is true to the words as he waddles out with his squad of prisoners of war to train for their football match against the German national team. *Too true*. The squad have been given better ration by the Germans, but from the beginning of the film Caine looks as though he has been putting in extra training in Langan's Brasserie for a De Niro growl-with-your-part role, rather than for that of a West Ham and England footballer toughened by Nazi bed and board. A diminutive Spanish writer appears to have been brought along to give credence to Caine's opinions of the players. Close inspection reveals, however, that he is Spurs' Argentinian midfielder player "Ossie" Ardiles.

The trouble with *Escape to Victory* is not that it demands the suspension of disbelief — one form of audience participation which never harms the box-office — but that it disturbs its incredibility by giving us grounds for belief and then changing the cinematic codes of credibility before leaving Caine with a little make-believe, can be accepted as a footballer (Puskas and Francis Lee were never Twiggies). This is the basic "we know he can't but we'll pretend he can" actor-as-hero form of suspension of disbelief. Pele and Bobby Moore can be accepted as unknown discoveries. (Pele plays a Trinidad soldier!) This is the "we know he can and will but we'll pretend we don't" hero-as-actor form of suspension (which invites a conspiracy between audience and hero against those members of Equity pretending not to be in the know). We can even accept the combination of both these forms

when, at the beginning of the film, Caine, the old pro, organizes matches to see which of the prisoners is good enough to play a German army team. (Pele, Moore and John Wark among others pass the test.) But then the match is upgraded to be against the German national team. Caine asks for, and gets, sundry international footballers from other prisoner-of-war camps. These are played, except for the East European, by sundry international footballers who, though better known on the Continent, are far less famous than the "unknowns", Moore and Pele.

At this point the film adds to our confusion by abandoning all pretence of explanation as to who's who — whether each player, however well-known he is, is meant to be playing an unknown, a not so well-known or a very well-known footballer. An encyclopaedic knowledge of football only adds to the problem. The all-conquering recognizes the talented young Ipswich winger Kevin O'Callaghan, only to find him playing the English goalkeeper. This miscasting, perverse even by Hollywood's standards, comes to a brief and brutal end when Caine has to break O'Callaghan's arm so that Sylvester Stallone can be let out of the punishment coop to replace him. This is not because Stallone is a better goalkeeper — everyone inside and outside the film knows he isn't — but because, only having joined the team in order to escape (which he does by deforming French and German with the nasal skill he normally reserves for the English language) he has allowed himself to be recaptured so as to tell the players of the French Resistance's plans for their get-out during the match. (This is the "Early Bath" form of escape: a gaping hole made in the communal bath which leads to the Paris sewers.) As Rocky, Stallone is a curious case of the double-blind retrospective form of suspension of disbelief — we believe in him more as a bum no-hope boxer made good because he was a bum no-hope actor made good by

making a film about a bum: hence *Rocky II, III*. . . . In this film we know he'll make good and save the vital penalty, but because he's got to pretend not to be Rocky between the remakes he catches the ball rather than punches it away.

A complete ignorance of footballing personalities does not avoid all confusion either, since we are left with the question of which players look like players. Some look fit throughout the film, others like Moore, Mike Summerbee and the Dutchman Co Prins have obviously dabbled with braver training techniques (and Prins has grey hair to boot). One could be prepared to leave out all consideration of the physical attributes of footballers for the sake of the film, but for the East Europeans, who turn out to be skeletons too emaciated to kick a ball (the "we know they can't but we'll pretend they could" minor-actors-as-fallen-heroes form of suspension). One could even pretend that though one can be too thin to play football, it is difficult to be too fat. But then Ardiles looks all bones.

To distract us from this collective identity crisis, the non-playing cast prove that a new generation of English actors can slip into their war-film roles as easily as the last (Clive Merrison is excellent as the camp forger), and the Germans speak German even to Sylvester Stallone. There is a theme of class conflict between the officers, who put escape before football, and the players, who put football before escape; and John Huston proves that great directors have to earn a living.

The match itself is a mixture of contact karate and amazing ball skills. Who wins? Let us say that the German team consists of the Hungarian national team (the "most foreigners will do as most foreigners form of suspension), two Ipswich reserves and the ex-captain of the New York Cosmos who has entered acting school. He shows great eyeball control in his stare-out with Stallone.

The Fringe and the future of theatre

By Harold Hobson

Andrew Cruickshank, the famous National Theatre actor who for many years past has been Festival Fringe at the Edinburgh Festival, chaired a conference on August 24 of which the declared purpose was to "discuss the theatre, its finance, its present condition, its future, and its relationship to the Fringe." These words occurred not only in the announcements of the official Festival brochure, which is the bible, constantly consulted, of the 450 companies which make up the Fringe, but on hundreds of leaflets displayed in shop windows throughout Edinburgh, for Mr Cruickshank is well known to be very apprehensive (as well he might be) of what will happen when the leasings of many West End theatres fall in during the next few years. The question in the minds of everyone connected with this conference, widely considered to be the most important Fringe event of the Festival, was what, if anything, can the Fringe do to help to save the theatre?

The answer given by the conference was unequivocal. The attitude to the theatre of the sort of company which belongs to the Fringe has changed beyond recognition during the last quarter of a century. In 1958 the theatre, as the ordinary theatre, was understood the term, was to be co-ordinated transport, which would bring about considerable economies. This idea was received with great favour, and Mr Cruickshank agreed enthusiastically to do something about it. Somebody wondered whether artists appearing in the Fringe, often with little money to spare, might not be given free admis-

sion to other Fringe shows. Mr Parrish who is a master of clear speech, indicated that if a show is worth putting on, it is worth paying to see. As one who hasn't paid for his seat once in the last forty years, I regard this view with sympathy.

The meeting, however, was not concerned only with itself. We were all gathered together in the Fringe Club, which stands like a grim Bastille amidst a scene of destruction and desolation that spells the ruin of one of Edinburgh's loveliest areas, George Square. This desecration is the work, not of capitalist entrepreneurs (who are expected to do anything for money) but of the University of Edinburgh. An exceptionally charming and broadminded don had explained to me the day before that it was an example of true tragedy: the accomplishment of good by the destruction of good.

With such representatives of the Fringe and the general public as had turned up, however, this argument did not wash. The conduct of the University was condemned without any voice except that of Mrs Mickey York (Edinburgh Graduate Theatre Group) being raised in its defence. This was a bizarre ending to a meeting called to discuss how the Fringe could help the future of the theatre. So far as I was able to make out (I arrived towards the close of Mr Cruickshank's opening speech) the subject of the meeting was never even mentioned. As soon as Edinburgh University had received its reproach Cruickshank declared the morning session to be closed, and indicated, to the consternation of visitors from New Zealand and other distant places, that the afternoon session would not take place.